



LYNX D-TYPE by Peter Tomalin

'There's only one way in: reach for the small metal lever, open the tiny door, climb over the high sill and stand on the leather seats'



It's a funny old world. Back in 1956, when the D-type was at the very height of its track success (it had just won Le Mans for the second successive year), Jaguar could hardly give them away. In November of that year, only 13 examples had found buyers and the company still had 29 in stock. The basic price was £2,585. Makes you want to weep, doesn't it?

Now that the world is 35 years wiser, just one of those cars will change hands for a million pounds or more — much more if it has a competition history. Settle for a Lynx replica and you'll still have to pay

£100,000-plus and wait 18 months for the privilege.

But privilege is the right word. Just as there are good cars and there are great cars, there are good replicas and there are great replicas. The Lynx D-type is a great replica of the greatest sports-racing car of all.

At Lynx's St Leonards-on-Sea base in Sussex, original factory cars are restored alongside the 'new' D-types being built. It's hard to tell them apart. Lynx D-types are hand-built from the original Jaguar drawings — just count the rivets down the side!— and each takes a year to assemble. There's a rightness about them that's difficult to explain but impossible to mistake.

The differences are all under the skin. Behind every Lynx D-type there's a donor E-type, saved from the scrap heap to surrender its vital organs — engine, gearbox, suspension and brakes. The practice is born of necessity, but it does have distinct advantages when it comes to sheer drivability, most significantly because the original car had a live rear axle (making handling a real handful on anything but the smoothest surfaces), whereas the E had independent rear suspension.

Lynx rebuilds all the donor car mechanicals and manufactures every other bit of the D itself, from the handsome alloy road wheels to the wood rim steering wheel. With triple twin-choke Weber carburetors replacing the E's original SUs, maximum output from the classic 3.8-litre straight six XK engine is rated at 285bhp (compared with 246bhp from the original D-type's 3.4-litre unit).

You want performance figures Well, when Road& Track magazine hitched up a fifth wheel to a D-type back in 1956, they recorded 0-60mph in 4.7 seconds, 0-100 in 12.1 and a top speed of 162mph (though 180mph was quite feasible with higher differential). This is a quick motor car by any standards.

The short-nose Lynx D-type I'm about to drive seems to be doing at least 140mph just sitting there in the car park. This car is three years old, has done about 8000 miles and is for sale again through Lynx at £95,000 (the original owners paid about half that — not a bad return). It's the most valuable car I've driven, one of the quickest too, and certainly the most beautiful. Which makes the prospect of driving it on unfamiliar roads both mouth-watering and nerve-racking.



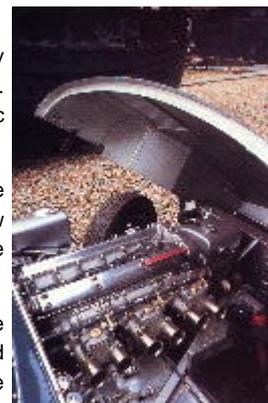
There's only one way in to this D-type; you reach inside for a small metal lever, open the tiniest door you've ever seen, climb over the high sill and stand on the leather seats (no, it doesn't seem right!) before wriggling your way down and under the vast steering wheel that sits in your lap. There's nowhere to rest your clutch foot, but the clutch itself is so heavy there's no danger of riding it. Just to your left there's a massive 180mph speedo and an equally impressive tacho, calibrated to 7000rpm (5750rpm is the recommended limit). Gauges and pull switches are scattered around the functional dash.

Turn the key, squeeze the stubby starter button and the double overhead cam 'six' snorts and rumbles to life, burbling menacingly at idle. Blip the throttle and the note from the twin exhaust pipes, exiting half way down the nearside of the car, is throaty, almost brutal.

You really have to push hard on the clutch — I wondered if I'd hit the brake pedal by mistake, it's that firm — and the spindly-looking gear lever feels light and sweet by comparison as you slot into first. It's a brute of a clutch when it bites, and I'm relieved not to stall as we ease out into the tight lunchtime traffic around Hastings and head for the Sussex countryside.

One of the first things that strikes you is that you're looking straight out over the louvred bonnet and those sensuously curving front wings with no windscreen in the way. The shallow perspex screen pushes the airflow mercifully above eye-level, but your forehead and scalp take a real pounding. Biggles-style headgear might be the answer, but not if you want to savour the racer-raw exhaust and the XK at full chat.

And what a glorious racket it is. Drop down a gear for the sheer hell of it—there's really no need, for the formidable torque will see you pull outrageously low rpm even in fourth (top) — and the sound positively explodes off wall and hedgerow. Charging up behind dawdling traffic, you need simply to size up the gap ahead, ease open the throttle and the D-type thunders forward — unstoppable, unburstable.





She's happy with 2000rpm, really starting to fly at 3000. Hit 4000rpm and the exhaust's roar becomes a snarl, quite savage in its intent. You glance across at the speedo and you're deep into three figures — and it really feels like it, the bombardment of the senses quite intoxicating.



Back off and take a few moments to soak up the rest of the experience. The ride is actually quite good, though potholes crash through the aluminium body panels. The brakes (discs all round, and Lynx fits an uprated servo) require a hefty shove but they're well up to the job, and the steering is light and precise once you've got used to the girth of the wheel. The gearchange requires precision and a firm hand but the shift itself is as quick as you'd wish.

As confidence grows and you start putting the power down earlier through the bends, the level of grip from those skinny Dunlop racing tyres perched on six-inch rims is higher than you'd imagined. But this is a three-year-old car going on 35, and that level is soon breached if you're pressing on. The joy is that the break-away is wonderfully progressive in a way that drivers of wide-tyred moderns wouldn't believe, and you soon learn to balance the car on the throttle.

All too quickly it's time to return the car to Lynx. The company has now built more than 50 D-type and XKSS replicas — Jaguar itself built just 87, so the gap is closing. But it's closing slowly; it has taken Lynx 18 years to get this far and it's not about to start cutting corners. The D-type, real or Lynx replica, will remain a rare sight, a thing of rare beauty, and a driving experience of rare pleasure.



Lynx Cars Limited builds D-type replicas, long or short-nose, and also XKSS replicas, all strictly to order. Prices start at around £100,000 and there's an 18-month wait from placing your order to taking delivery.

