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THE CAT GETS ANOTHER LIFE by Tony Robinson

After being rescued from receivership earlier this year, Jaguar specialists Lynx return with the head-turning, XJS-based, Eventer Estate at the focus of their production schedule. We put this rather special estate car through its paces.



This is the unexpected story of crossing a Lynx with a Jaguar with a bit of estate car magic thrown in. If the Lynx name seems slightly familiar, incidentally, it's because this is the company which made its name building wonderfully faithful Jaguar D-Type replicas. As many specialist manufacturing concerns have discovered over recent years, however, one product may not be a successful business make. The situation is made rather more difficult when that product costs £125,000 and the major markets into which you're selling are headed irrevocably toward recession.



Just by way of a brief historical note, Lynx has gone through several incarnations during the last decade, and aside from their very high quality replica D-Types, put its name to several modern based Jaguar conversions including the Performer, a 450bhp, twin-turbocharged XJS, and the Eventer, an exceptionally neat estate car conversion, also based on the XJS.

"The company went into receivership early this year but the good news, however, is that it was purchased by John Mayston-Taylor, an enthusiast who is an engineer and feet-on-the-ground businessman. His intention from the outset was to rebuild Lynx on a solid financial foundation, and one of the ways of doing that was to concentrate on producing comparatively affordable machinery.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS - The recent financial ups and downs of the company meant very little has been produced under the Lynx name for the last 18 months. With the company now on a reasonably stable footing, however, Mayston-Taylor is ready to start production again, and the Eventer is the vehicle he is pinning his hopes on.

It consists of a comprehensive and personalised conversion based on either a six or 12-cylinder XJS. Predictably enough, the restyling required to produce the Eventer's svelte-looking shape involved significant alterations to the body shell.

These include: an entirely new roof section and rear pillars that incorporate an extractor system to ensure the correct functioning of the standard car's air conditioning system - the addition of a rear hatch with bonded-in, heated safety glass - strengthening to the rear quarters of the car's rear side windows in safety glass, and modified rear seating arrangements. In addition, a specially constructed fuel tank is fitted flush below the rear load platform, while the fuel pump is externally mounted for quietness.



The changes add 60kg (132lbs) to the weight of a standard XJS, but this is balanced off by the fact that the improved aerodynamics of the longer roofline make for a more efficient shape which, all else being equal, endows the Eventer with a 2-3mph higher top speed. The vehicle's centre of gravity is also moved rearwards by 3 in. which has a slight beneficial effect on handling.

The only external details which could possibly be criticised are the rather agricultural looking tail gate hinges. The problem is that these would not easily fit inside, and even if they did, would reduce the effective height of the door opening.

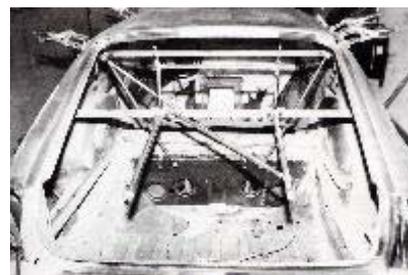
No Eventer is exactly the same as any other since the final specification, in terms of both trim and paint finish, is up to the customer. There are also a number of optional extras, including a dog guard, sunroof, security blind for the load area, Lynx Performer body kit (except for the rear spoiler), and any of a range of after-market steering wheels and alloy road wheels.

DRIVER AND PASSENGER ENVIRONMENT - The Eventer concept could be classified as environmentally sound since it is intended to "recycle" older Jaguar XJS models by turning them into new Eventers rather than allowing them to slide inexorably towards the clutches of a breaker's yard.



As part of the £16,000 (plus VAT) price tag for the conversion, Lynx includes a certain amount of mechanical refurbishment and refitting of the original vehicle. The interior, for instance, remains Jaguar through and through, but is retrimmed to original vehicle standards using high quality carpet, English woolcloth for the headlining and Connolly hide for the new rear seats, which also feature a 50-50 split folding backseat.

In addition, the new load area is fully carpeted and, in the case of the test car, even boasted a "Lynx" logo stitched in leather on the floor section of the carpeting.





The key aspect of any estate car is its versatility, and here the Eventer scores well compared with the standard XJS. Quite aside from the fact that the driver's rearward vision is considerably improved by the larger rear window and the elimination of the XJS's flying buttress rear pillars, the Eventer is potentially a far more useful vehicle.

Admittedly, it doesn't have the cargo-carrying capacity of a bigger more utilitarian estate car, but it nonetheless offers a flat load floor when the rear seats are folded forward with a useable length of 72 in. (49in. with the seats up) a width of 43 in. and a height of 24 in. Load space with the rear seats in use is 31 cu ft and 46 cu ft when they're folded down.

One of the few points of criticism concerning the Eventer involves the rear seat folding mechanism. This involves reaching in from the side and lifting up the seat back from the base while pulling it forward to release the hinges. It's a decidedly awkward manoeuvre which almost makes you think twice about bothering to fold the seats over.

A downside to the standard XJS has always been the lack of rear seat leg and head room. The test car, which is actually the eighth Eventer built in a total production run to date of 72 vehicles unfortunately suffers from the same problem. But as John Mayston-Taylor points out a modification was incorporated after car no. 50 (it had been a £2000 option from car no. 20) which improved the situation considerably. This involves moving the seat base rearwards by 2 in. and increasing the angle of the rear seat back by 10 deg. to liberate an extra 3 in. of head room.



The beautifully crafted tailgate swings upward on a pair of gas struts to reveal a useful-sized opening which extends down to rear bumper level, thus facilitating easy loading and unloading of awkward-shaped objects. A lockable compartment in the left rear wing provides a useful amount of secure storage space, while a similar one on the right side houses the electronics, battery rear screen washer bottle and retracting aerial mechanism. The spare wheel is slung under the loadfloor.

ON THE MOVE - Amazingly, bearing in mind it's generally "together", taut feel, the Eventer car tested here had been built on the then new 1983 XJS HE although it's apparently rather more the norm for the work to be carried out on three or four-year old cars according to Mayston-Taylor.

This particular machine had also been resprayed in Ecurie Ecosse Flag Blue and retrimmed in Biscuit Connolly hide, very much a 1950's Jaguar upholstery shade. The finish was chosen to produce a "colour- coordinated rig" since this Eventer is Lynx's own runabout used regularly to tow the company's Ecurie Ecosse D-Type replica to events.

In defence of its workhorse role, the car also sported a robust, Lynx-designed tow hitch and adjustable rear dampers - the fronts remain in standard specification. In addition, the suspension had been modified with uprated springs front and rear plus low-profile 225/50ZR16 tyres mounted on 16 in. Fondmetal alloy wheels.

As with the rest of an Eventer's specification, the choice of suspension changes is up to the individual customer and the ride and handling compromise he or she wants to achieve. Quite apart from the high-speed towing role, which it evidently performs admirably with combined load-trailer weights of up to 3000lb. Mayston-Taylor wanted to give the demonstrator a "classic" Jaguar feel. With that in mind, other cosmetic changes include a US specification four headlamp system, colour-coded bumpers and front spoiler, Sportspack striping and Jaguar Sport leather rim steering wheel.



Fuel consumption depends on the base model chosen, but the additional weights of the Eventer conversion does not appear to have an adverse effect. The test car averaged between 18 and 20

mpg during our time with it, although the figure can evidently plunge to 13-15 mpg when towing.



DAY TO DAY - On climbing behind the wheel of the Eventer, anyone who is at all familiar with Jaguars will feel instantly at home, all of the controls, switchgear and instruments being in their accustomed places. The first surprise, though, comes as soon as you drive off - the steering has been improved beyond belief. Gone is the overly light and rather uncommunicative version of the standard XJS to be replaced by steering with ample weighting, reassuring feel and good self-centring action. In short, it's a revelation.

At first, we suspected the improvement was the result of some clever changes to the front suspension geometry possibly combined with modified valving in the power steering pump. It's actually far simpler than that, as Mayston-Taylor explained. "There's not a great deal wrong with

Jaguar's steering design other than that they use a lot of very compliant rubber bushes which can result in a somewhat woolly feel at times" he says. "We discovered that by replacing about six of these rubber bushes with specially machined-up nylon ones, it's possible to improve the feel of the steering tremendously. It's not at all a big modification, but the result is fabulous, I think. It's just one of those tricks you learn when you've been working on Jaguars for a long time."

The other surprise about the test car was not such a positive one. Although the handling was crisp and predictable, the combination of stiffer springs, uprated rear dampers and low-profile 50 series tyres made for an unpleasantly harsh ride at times and undoubtedly contributed to some of the interior squeaks and rattles which were apparent on less well surfaced roads. In fairness, however, most customer versions would be set up to provide far more pliant ride quality.



That criticism aside, virtually every other aspect of the Lynx Eventer conversion is a positive one. On the road, the car retains all the best attributes of the standard XJS coupe, while feeling less claustrophobic inside. In addition, rearward visibility is noticeably improved. In short, there are no obvious drawbacks.

WHAT IT COSTS - Lynx requires eight to ten weeks to produce an Eventer and, as mentioned previously, the cost is £16,000 plus VAT. The latter can be reclaimed if the car is a company vehicle or is to be exported once the job has been completed. All work carried out by Lynx is covered by a one year warranty on paintwork and mechanical defects, while whatever remains of the car's standard Jaguar warranty is unaffected by the conversion. Mayston-Taylor also takes the view that since each Lynx product is hand-built, any problems would be assessed on their own merits, even if strictly outside the standard warranty period,

The Eventer is a comparatively rare machine, and that, combined with the high quality of the Lynx conversion, means that residual values are, if anything likely to be higher than a comparable year and mileage XJS.

VERDICT - The Lynx Eventer conversion undoubtedly makes a lot of financial sense when carried out on an XJS which is over four years old, for there's not only a benefit from a tax standpoint, but also the opportunity provide what may be a well loved, but slightly tired Jaguar with a new lease of life.



Mayston-Taylor sees the Eventer as being of particular interest to, say the company director who might like the idea of replacing his current XJS with what appears to be a new (and more useful) Jaguar at less than half the price of one with a K registration plate. But there's nothing to stop you from taking one, brand new from the factory down to Lynx to convert. All up a 5.3 would set you back a shade under £60,000 which makes it look like a bargain alongside an Aston Martin Shooting Brake which at £168,000 would set you back a whopping great one hundred grand more!