



Jaguar Driver – May 2002

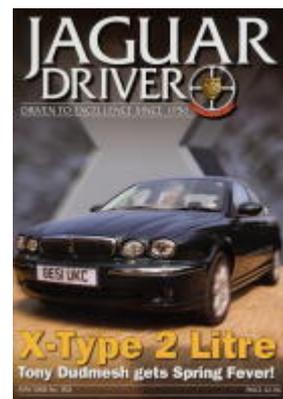
THE LAST EVENTER by Ian Cooling

Ian Cooling records the end of the line for one of the finest Jaguar conversions ever.



Early on the morning of 14th August 1982, a very svelte XJS - looking like no other - eased into Browns Lane for the factory open day. Heads turned then and they have continued to turn ever since. This was the first public appearance of the XJS Eventer.

Writing about the day in the November 1982 issue of Jaguar Driver, Editor Nigel Thorley, commented that it was both a well-proportioned and highly practical car. He went on to say, "The style is extremely pleasing to the eye and the whole car appears to be built to a high standard."



"Having just seen the last Eventer in the course of construction, I can certainly vouch for the latter. The former is beyond doubt. So many Jaguar conversions have failed dismally, ending up looking rather as if an iron chicken coop has been welded on the back of one of Sir William's finest. Highly skilled coachbuilders have been very badly let down by the designers more than once; not so with the Eventer. I saw my first one in the metal, pootling gently through Mayfair, a couple of years later and was immediately smitten. Here was a conversion which, when you see one for the first time, makes you ask "Why didn't they make it like that in the first place?"

Proof that this was a view shared by many others, lies in the production figures. Lynx, based in St Leonards-on-Sea then as now, produced their first customer car in March 1983 and have gone on to produce 66 of these conversions. The last of the line, No 67, is the one under construction at the moment and illustrated in the accompanying photographs. The end of XJS production and consequent drying up of the supply of acceptable donor cars, sadly mean that the Eventer saga must come to an end.



Lynx was established in the late 1960s by ex-Weslake engineer, Guy Black and architect Roger Ludgate. Guy's first restoration was a Riley Lynx, carried out in a Hastings lock up. Later, his skills well honed but with strong memories of that first project, he set up (of course) Lynx Engineering with Roger. By then, he had graduated to a converted milking parlour in Northiam in Kent. Eventually, the company came to rest in St Leonards.

Subsequently, much expertise was gained restoring and renovating C Type and D Type Jaguars for clients. This led to Lynx's first in-house creation - the Lynx D Type. The Lynx C Type followed and then the Lynx Lightweight E Type. By the late 1970's they turned their attention to the XJS. Almost from the date of its launch in 1975, Jaguar customers had been regretting the lack of a convertible XJS. In 1979, Lynx stepped in and filled the gap.

The original genesis of the Eventer is lost in the mists of company time. However, in the early 1980s, rumours started to circulate that a Browns Lane convertible was on its way. Given this, a spot of re-insurance would certainly have made commercial sense. Whatever the background, four years later, the Eventer was a reality within the Lynx range.



The Car How, then, is this beauty created? The first move is to strip out the interior and screen all internal and external surfaces that are not to be worked on. The rear suspension is removed, along with the petrol tank. Then come out the cutters and torch to chop off the rear bodywork above the waistline from the B post right back to the rear lights. The roof also goes - from just behind the windscreen, leaving the car looking a very forlorn shadow of its former self. "This is the stage when we try and keep the owners away!" joked Lynx MD, John Mayston-Taylor laconically.

The action then moves back inside the car, to cut away the front of the rear axle housing. The excess space in front of the rear suspension cage is used for Lynx's luxurious rear seats and also to create an extra two inches of leg-room for the rear passengers. Any member of that exclusive club of untied contortionists who have travelled any distance in the back of an XJS would certainly welcome that.

Once this work is completed, the process of creating those beautifully elegant lines really begins. Jigs are fitted to both sides and new metal panels gradually evolve round them into the Eventer shape. Transverse bracing bars are fitted overhead, ready to take the roof panel. One of the clues to the quality of workmanship in an Eventer is that the company refused from the start to consider the soft option of a vinyl roof covering (a la XJ Coupe). The beautifully smooth line of the finished roof says it all.

Meanwhile, underneath, the rear suspension is being rebuilt. The conversion shifts the centre of gravity towards the back, so the suspension is stiffened. It is also more firmly located. Good news for anyone who has been at the helm of an XJS squirming along the road under hard acceleration.

Once the roof is sorted, the kidney-shaped fuel tank is fitted inside (the spare wheel sits neatly in the middle of the arch of the kidney), the rear door is hung on its hinges, windows are installed, electrics and other systems woven back into the bodywork and the car handed over for a multi-coat paint job. Then the trimmers take over.





Here too, Lynx style is very much in evidence. All upholstery, carpets, etc. are of the highest quality. For example, they have redesigned the rear seats. These are now split, to give loading flexibility, and can both lie flat to give a level rear platform over 6 feet in length I can confirm the length, because I once slept in the back of an Eventer, having missed a car ferry. And very comfortable it was to o.

The Extras This, then, is the basic process of conversion However, as each car is very much a bespoke item created to the customer's own template, much more can be done. The body colour could be completely changed, the engine breathed on, manual gearbox installed suspension further modified quad headlights fitted and extra trim added inside. Norway's import duty rules have lead to two cars being finished as two-seaters only. Another special was trimmed in blue crocodile hide and finished with a two-tone paint job for a member of the Gucci family. Lord Steele's Eventer was quietly under-stated.

As you might expect, the principal Eventer power unit has been the Jaguar V12, including two XJR-S models. What was surprising was to discover that only five of the 67 Eventers produced have had six-cylinder engines. However, one of those was a real special - the engine was significantly tuned to compliment the five-speed manual gearbox, other key mechanical components up- graded to XJR-S spec and the interior fully re-trimmed. This car was at Lynx while I was there and it really is a stunner.



The Bottom Line "So", you will be wondering, "how much does this all cost?" Well, as I said above, there is enormous scope for pouring the entire contents of your piggy bank into a very wide range of tailor-made options. However, when the car was first launched in 1982, the cost of the basic conversion was £6,695. Twenty years later, the cost during the final year of marketing was £49,500. Sounds heavy, but it is about right if you compound up twenty years of inflation. To that, you have to add VAT and the cost of the donor car - say, £20,000. "And that will be just a smidgen under £80,000 Sir.

But all is not lost; conversions from the late 1980s and early 1990s, with a full Jaguar service history and in good nick, regularly surface for around £10-15,000. Set that against your 80 grand and I cannot think of a better bargain on the market. Now where are those classified ads!