



Performance Car - June 1993

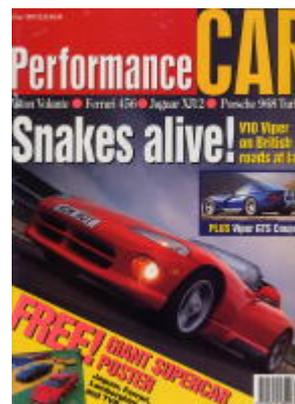
The art of the estate by Peter Tomalin

Who says estate cars are boring? The latest Lynx Eventer is anything but, as Peter Tomalin discovered



The chap power-washing the stand at the Goodwood race track (the one where they run the gee-gees, that is) summed it up rather nicely. As we parked for the photographs, he called over: "That's a bit special, isn't it? XJS Estate, eh? Haven't seen many of those around yet."

You see, he thought it was a factory Jaguar: the new XJS estate car, following on from the coupe and the convertible. And is that really so surprising? The Eventer, built at the Sussex seaside by Lynx Motors International, looked good enough to have rolled out of Browns Lane that morning, just as Lynx's XJS convertible was good enough to stand comparison with Jaguar's own (which, incidentally, it preceded by a good six years.)



And this is no mean achievement, for there's a real art to turning a saloon — or coupe, for that matter — into a genuine estate car without screwing up the looks of the things in a pretty major way. The best of them, like the Sierra Estate and the BMW 5-series Touring, are great looking cars in their own right; the worst, and I'm sorry but Aston's recent effort with the Virage comes to mind, look clumsily contrived (I can also recall a Mk II Jag estate, the work of a coachbuilder back in the Sixties and almost - too horrid for words).

The old-style Eventer (Lynx has been building them 10 years now, total built 55) looked pretty good but this new car, based on the facelifted XJS, is better still. The new Jaguar tail treatment really lends itself to the conversion, while the hinges for the tailgate now fit flush inside the roof, which tidies up the lines a treat.

But it works above all because Lynx does more than simply tack on an estate back. When an XJS arrives at the workshop it's stripped of all trim, inside and out. Seats, carpets, headlining, fuel tank, rear screen, side screens, and lots of veneery, chromy bits all go into store. Then, and this is important, the roof is cut away from just behind the windscreen right back past the infamous flying buttresses. The bulkhead in front of the rear axle is moved back, and the new rear floor with all its supporting metalwork is set in position.



The top sections of the rear wings are reshaped, the inner wings reinforced, then a body jig is set into the car around which is built the new upper-body structure - cant rails, cross braces, roof pressings and what-have-you, all aligned and welded into place. Once this has been done the tailgate can be positioned, et voila!-the XJS becomes the Eventer.

"The completed structure is lead-loaded where necessary to achieve the desired smoothness of line, then the new rear seats - folding backs, of course are fitted. Finally the trim goes in, all the new materials carefully matched to the old, along with the new side-glass.

All of which would be a great waste of everybody's time and money (the conversion takes around 10 weeks and costs £18,800 all inclusive) if the Eventer couldn't hack it as a genuine estate. To that end Lynx has been careful to provide a load platform that's both accessible, courtesy of the large tailgate that opens to bumper level, and flat - the spare tyre lies under the floor. Lynx's specially-made fuel tank wrapping snugly around it to make best use of the available room. Spacing blocks are added to the rear springs to increase the ride height, and if the owner is planning to use the car for towing, uprated springs and dampers are fitted.

The Eventer won't separate many antique dealers from their Volvos (you'll not squeeze too many tallboys in there, and your labradors would get ever so growly if you used XJS performance to the full) but if you've a mountain of luggage to move, not forgetting the golf clubs, and you want to arrive in good time and high style, there's little else to touch it. Certainly that was the conclusion of Brussels-based businessman Peter Johns, whose left-hand-drive, V12-powered car we tried.



You're struck first by the high standard of fit and finish, both outside - the shutlines around the tailgate are more than a match for Jaguar's own - and in, where the new carpets, Connolly hide seat facings and cloth headlining blend perfectly to recreate that special Jaguar ambience. There are neat details too, like the switch for the tailgate wash/wipe nestling inconspicuously between the electric window switches in the centre console.

You'd expect it to drive pretty much like a standard XJS V12, and up to a point it does. The 5.3-litre V12 wafts you around in near silence, the suspension soaks up minor surface imperfections like they didn't exist, and when you floor the throttle the old three-speed auto flicks down a ratio and you're off on an eerily refined charge towards the horizon.

Ah, but. Turn in to the first proper corner at a decent lick, and there are two surprises waiting. First, this car reacts to steering inputs with a keenness and incisiveness that's almost shocking in a V12 XJS. The reason: Lynx has replaced the rubber bushes in the steering assembly with nylon ones (they can do this to any XJS at a cost of £235). You have to adopt a much more subtle, measured approach than is usual with these cars if you're to steer accurately and smoothly.

Second, and perhaps partly as a consequence of this new-found front-end sharpness, the car suddenly feels a little tail-happy. 'A bit skittish' was how Peter Johns had described it before we took the car away, adding that the springs needed time to bed down. Certainly it felt as though



it would benefit from some extra weight over the rear wheels - with a near-empty load bay and just photographer Bailie and myself inside, it skipped over bumpy surfaces and began to slide its tail at only moderately fast cornering speed. Lynx says that when the ride height settles, this Eventer will return to its usual, benign XJS ways.

In other respects it's difficult to fault. The lasting impression is of an extremely well-made car, with absolutely none of the creaks and rattles one might have thought would result from chopping and changing the coupe bodyshell. Estates rarely feel all-of-a-piece quite like this one does.

So, Jocasta's gymkhana or a high-powered business seminar — the Eventer wouldn't look out of place at either. A fortnight's shopping at Sainsbury's, or a weekend's fishing in the Highlands — no problem. A night at the opera, or a day at the races — don't you just love those old Marx Brothers films? The British have always liked estate cars. Heavens, in the Thirties there were even Rolls-Royce estates (they were known as Woodys; the royals adored them). Except that back then an estate was called a shooting brake, which seems far more appropriate for a car like the Eventer. So why is the term no longer used? Because journalists wouldn't be able to write a headline that said 'Estate of the Art' every time they got a story like this, that's why.

