



Jaguar World Monthly – May 2005

SOUTHPAW by Ian Kuah

Any XKSS - whether an original or a re-creation - is a very rare car, but there's only one in the world with the steering wheel on the left. Ian Kuah drives it...



Road testing a left-hand-drive XKSS is a first, not only for this writer, but for the entire Jaguar community worldwide, as all the 16 original Jaguar XKSSs built in 1957, and all seven Lynx hand-crafted reproductions constructed since, came out of their respective factories in right-hand-drive form.

The only left-hooker in existence appears before our eyes, as if a mirror-image of perfection, and this is the story of how such a unique XKSS came about.

The client - In recent years, Lynx has found its comprehensive website to be an efficient tool to prime prospective clients on what is available. "It is an effective way of taking Lynx to our prospective customers," said Lynx proprietor John Mayston-Taylor.

In this case, the client is a computer consultant who designs web cafes in the Czech Republic. Young, but very knowledgeable, this car enthusiast was after a really special car that he would relish driving, but that would also not attract attention like a new Ferrari.

"We are seeing a new generation of customer in their 30s, who do not remember the 1950s cars when they were new, but yearn for the simplicity and directness of such cars," said John. "The feeling of freedom, the good power-to-weight ratio and less traction from skinny tyres are all part and parcel of the appeal of a car that you have to drive."

By the time the customer visited Lynx, not only had he set his heart on an XKSS, he had done his research very well indeed, which helped Lynx immensely too. It was clear that he fully understood how and why Lynx do certain things to achieve its legendary high standards, and he appreciated why some things cost as much as they do.

"Acknowledging that we had never built a LHD XKSS before, he was willing to be the first and to pay for the extra work this would entail," said John.

Bespoke build - Since a car like this takes anything from seven to nine months to build from scratch, Lynx always documents and photographs every stage of the build and sends or e-mails this evidence to the customer with a stage payment invoice.

Having seen more than one original XKSS, it's fair to say that in terms of detail finish a Lynx reproduction improves on the quality of the 1950s original, which was, after all, based on a raw racing machine. In fact, in those respects, as well as the resulting driving experience. Lynx cars always feel more like the original would have, had it been developed for longer. A 1950s design built with present day knowledge, expertise and precision is a fair way to sum up a Lynx reproduction.

While the Lynx XKSS (and D-type) recreations gain sophistication in ride and handling by using the E-type independent rear suspension, the body construction process for the Lynx XKSS is very much as per the original Jaguar factory car. Bearing in mind that the XKSS was the road-going version of a Le Mans winning racer, the entire bodyshell is made from aluminium. It comprises a central monocoque with the front and rear sections welded or riveted together to form the various body units that attach to that central monocoque.

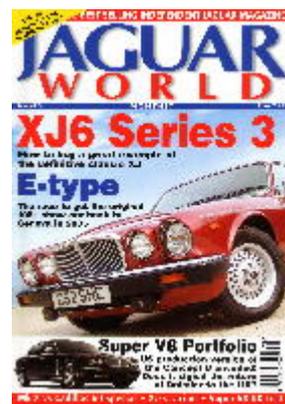


The front chassis frames are new and are fabricated from rectangular steel tubing and bolted to the front bulkhead of the monocoque. The later Jaguar E-type continued to use this method of construction, albeit with a steel body. However, the tubing Lynx uses has 25% more torsional rigidity than the original E-type, which used Reynolds steel tubing.

The body panels that give the XKSS its curvaceous lines have incredibly complex compound curves that have to be hand-formed from flat sheets of aluminium. This difficult task and labour intensive process is done using an English Wheel, a unique device that a skilled operator uses to shape the metal to exactly cover the contours of the wooden body bucks.

Designing and fabricating the LHD conversion added nearly four weeks to the car's build, but the process was substantially easier than converting an existing RHD car. The work was made simpler by the fact that the engineers were starting with a clean sheet of aluminium, so to speak.

However, the task was not quite as straightforward as mirror imaging the RHD car. For instance, the passenger side footbox is shorter than the driver's side, and the exhaust system had to be re-routed to suit the modified floorpan. Understanding the complexities involved helps you appreciate what it takes for a major European manufacturer to create a RHD version of a car and is something best done at the development stage.





The client is quite tall and so, to give him the maximum flexibility, Lynx installed a dished panel for the footwell, increased the room behind the seatback by moving the panel aft by three inches within the monocoque, and installed a modern fully-adjustable pedal assembly. To facilitate this, the brake master cylinders were moved from their position behind the pedal box onto the bulkhead. The owner also wanted a speedometer calibrated in km/h, so a new dial was silk screen-printed as a one-off.

Increased power - An XKSS, especially the Lynx version with its hand-built engine, is not a slow car, but the customer wanted more power, and especially torque. Applying all its experience to the power unit, the engine shop started out with a stock Jaguar 4.2-litre block from the E-type donor car. This was thoroughly inspected, crack detected and strengthened before work began to enlarge its bore and stroke to 92.58 x 112mm for a swept capacity of 4,524cc.

The block was then fitted with a new fully-balanced, forged steel crankshaft, new lightweight steel competition connecting rods and forged pistons. The reciprocating parts were individually weighed to within one-gram tolerance. Some again as a set, and then also balanced as required.

The cylinder head is a new item machined to accept larger valves, uprated springs and lighter, higher quality cam buckets. High-lift camshafts, made to Lynx's own profile, are also fitted. Another Lynx developed modification is an inlet manifold designed with an integral water rail that is then ported to the cylinder head and fitted with triple Weber 45 DCOE carbs. For the ultimate in tractability and potential economy, a new Lynx option is fuel injection, but the owner of this car wanted a brace of Webers under the bonnet.



The compression ratio is a relatively modest 8.785:1 to cope with possible poor fuel quality. With gas-flowed heads and those triple Weber 45 DCOEs, the big XK motor produces 320bhp at 5,400rpm with 350lb ft of torque at 3,800rpm.

Driving on the left - For me, sitting on the left-hand-side of an XKSS is not a new experience as I have both driven and been driven in two Lynx XKSSs and even the original factory car. But having the steering wheel and pedals ahead of me on the left side is quite something else and a unique first as, at the time of the test, even the owner of this car had not yet had the pleasure.



Because the XKSS is a small car with light and communicative steering, positioning on the road is not a problem. The foot controls are also nicely weighted and progressive and, in common with all cars of this era, the carburettored engine has a crispness missing from modern power units, especially those with a single throttle body feeding a big intake plenum.

The extra torque from the 4.5-litre motor produces spectacular results in such a light car, and this means that the gearlever need only be used a lot either for the pleasure of doing so, or when really in a hurry. The tall, skinny tyres also mean that when the significant torque of this big motor is deployed, the driver had better be prepared to use the steering to contain the resulting slides.



Compared to today's supercars, the XKSS is a relatively small car and is easy to place on country roads. Its compact and nimble form coupled with that spectacular power-to-weight ratio makes it deceptively rapid on the open road. Lynx senior engineer Derek May built this car and is really proud of it. "Even though it has no heater, he is quite happy to go testing in winter weather," John told us. "He says the car is such a joy to drive he looks for every opportunity to road test it. It is gratifying to have someone still so keen after all these years!"

A car that has been put together so lovingly by one person for another is more than just a driving machine. "As with many of our clients, the project is the pleasure," John explained. "The process of choosing the specification and watching a car being built just for you has an appeal for some people that goes beyond simple ownership once it is finished. For some, the experience is like watching your child grow in its mother's womb. Fittingly, this car took almost exactly nine months to build."



Extra effort - Despite the extra work involved. Lynx are happy to have had the experience of developing the LHD patterns, as it can now offer both its famous D-type and XKSS re-creations to customers who feel happier sitting on the left. Over the years, the company has built a total of eight XKSSs, and the current price is £170,000 (US\$323,000) depending upon final specification plus local taxes. The LHD version adds £5,000 to that, with this first LHD Lynx XKSS (Number 8) finally costing about £185,000 plus taxes due to the various bespoke extras including the special high-performance 4.5-litre engine.

True, that sounds like an awful lot of money, but if you want a really unique sports car that gives you a level of driver feedback, even at normal road speeds, that exceeds that of any modern supercar, then a Lynx XKSS or D-type