



CARS AND CAR CONVERSIONS- May 1978

AN INDIAN SUMMER by John Bridgen



The old man watched, and a far away look came into his eyes, as he followed the car through his pear-drop glasses. The old lady watched and she scowled. The young boy watched and his jaw dropped. The old man raised his hand. Is it a feeble act of defiance against the machine, or against old age, which requires a person to grow weak when a car is restored to full strength? The latter I think, as the car in question was the immaculate Lynx D-type I was driving through a Sussex village.

This is not going to be a saga of that drive, but a look at one of the most extraordinary firms involved in motoring. Lynx Engineering, who make these beautiful Jaguar D-Type replicas, are not easy to find, hidden beside a disused railway line in the workshops of an old filling station near Tenterden. This is indeed an odd place to find a dozen of the most skilled restorers in the country.

But, briefly, back to the open road. The engine required a new set of plugs (there is not a long enough stretch of road down there to clear them) so I was asked not to push the Jaguar too hard . . . or about 80mph in second gear — you don't need the others in Sussex lanes!

The air was slightly chill, although it was a sunny spring afternoon, and by the time I arrived back at the works my face certainly felt ruddy even if it didn't look it.

Guy Black, the senior partner, told me the car would probably be a little disappointing to drive, but Chris Keith-Lucas bravely volunteered to sit in the passenger seat and, amazingly, was still talking to me after we returned.

The car, having E-Type running gear, was certainly no problem to drive, and the engine, with all that torque, was certainly a joy. The exhilaration is really derived from a superb body. This is a car which is simply designed to drive fast. It is both a driver's and a voyeur's car and if you happen to be both at the same time, then this machine approaches perfection. I have no figures, but it would be easy to break almost every speed limit in the country in first gear.

This particular D-Type was the first of the replicas made, and the one exhibited at the 1975 Racing Car show. It still looks as though it was brand new. It is owned by architect Roger Ludgate, who claims he was rich until he met Guy Black. These two gentlemen make the replicas, while Guy and Chris tackle the restoration work.

Guy is the common denominator, and the man who is responsible for setting up Lynx. The very first car he turned his hand to restoring, in 1969, happened to be a Riley Lynx. When it came to printing cards and letterheads, the only name he could think of in a hurry was Lynx, and in this way the company was born.

At the time Guy was working for Weslake as a design engineer. He left them in 1971 to restore a C-Type and became obsessed with the car, rapidly collecting spares in the process. Someone came along with a D-Type, which was duly restored, and another pile of spares was hoarded.

"While working on my first D-Type I realised how similar the D and E models were. Roger came along, and he is a great enthusiast who has love affairs with cars. I was mulling over the idea of building a replica. Roger agreed to buy the first one, and provide the money to put it in the 1975 Racing Car show. We finished the car the night before the show opened and although we didn't sell any at the time, we thought we had come away with 12 firm orders.

"We got geared up to make them, received our first order about four months later, and have been making them ever since. We now make a kit, which is all D-Type panels and parts, apart from E-Type running gear, which the client has to provide for himself. Everything is designed to fit an E-Type, so as long as he has one, the car can be built reasonably easily. We have so many orders now that there is a waiting list of two-and-a-half years for completed cars although only a year for the kits — and we haven't dared advertise in the United States yet. The vast majority of all E-Types were sent there, so we have an almost limitless market."

Chris Keith-Lucas also has an engineering background. He is the panel beating specialist in the replica section. Originally he worked for Guy but was so skilful and meticulous about his work that the boss enrolled him as a partner. If you need a D-Type bonnet, he can make you one, but it will cost about £1000. The materials are relatively cheap, only £100, but the remainder is made up with the sheer labour time it takes to mould an exact metal copy.

"We try to make everything ourselves" he said. "This is simply because getting someone else to make parts takes so long, and is so expensive. This way we know everything comes out reasonably consistent in quality. Many so-called experts in this field are not experts at all. Some people have different ideas about quality than others".

This calm, and diplomatic tact is part of the essence of the firm. There is a sort of serenity about the works. Everyone knows the job they have to do, and they do it with finesse. Every item is carefully planned in advance and the whole place well organised, not only from above, but from within. Each member of staff concentrates upon his individual forte, whether that may be chassis building, suspension, engine building, panel beating or design.





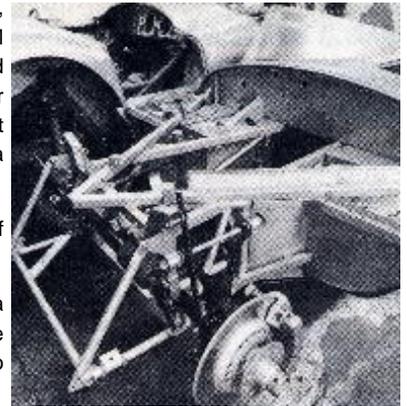
One of the many fascinating processes involved is the production of wheel spinners. These are cast locally, but then each one has to be fettled and polished, which is a slow and arduous task as the aluminium bronze is so hard. They are made of this metal to prevent them binding onto the wheel hub. They cost £45-£50 each, but these instant classics will be around a long time.

Every now and then, there is a "wheel-making week", and everyone drops what they are doing to make the £120 perfect replica wheels. As Guy pointed out, "when you make them in such small quantities they are bound to be expensive. Something else which falls into the same category are steering wheels. Each one which is a perfect replica of the original D type is individually made up from battens of wood, set vertically on the metal rim. It takes a man nearly a week to make one and we now believe we have the distinction of making the most expensive steering wheel in the world at £150 each".

This is a busy place. When I paid Lynx a visit, projects underway included rebuilding two C-Types, rebuilding a light-weight all aluminium E-Type, rebuilding four D-Types, rebuilding a Ferrari 121LM engine, and exchanging D-Type suspension on a Michelotti Special for E-Type running gear. The old running gear from the prototype was being fitted to one of the D-Types. It came from a historic car which ran twice at Le Mans — the yardstick of greatness until recently — coming third on its first appearance and crashing, killing its driver on the second occasion. It was rebuilt by Jaguar as a standard car, and found its way to Michelotti in Italy, where it was re-bodied.

Michelotti, of course, were responsible for the styling exercises on the TR6 and the Stag. Echoes of these cars can be seen in the special.

"It is a lovely idea having racing car suspension", said Chris, "but in fact it didn't work out having a heavy body and short travel suspension. The car was geared to do 80mph in first, a legacy of its Le Mans days which is no good for a road car. With a dry sump and multi-plate clutch it was all too complicated.



"For the D-Type we are making from its running gear, we were able to find an original tail section, in the stables of a Norfolk stately home. Apart from that, the rest will have to be made up by us.

"The C-Type we are making at the moment has many original components, but we have had to tailor the chassis to all the original dimensions. We are also using a different type of welding. Originally the seams were arc-welded but gas flux bronze welding is more suitable for this type of construction. The engine for this car has been built up from various bits. It is basically an XK150 HC engine, fully balanced with a full race cylinder head. We have built up a special gearbox with overdrive on all gears, so we will really be able to play tunes on it. It is going to be extremely quick. This one is destined for a client in Canada and will be mostly for show, although, I believe, used occasionally in competition.

"SU's were original equipment on the C-Type and we have found a pair of twin two inch versions, sand-cast. The car will be capable of about 150mph and, I expect, will give between 12 and 20mpg."

Moving down the workshop, we came to the D-Type and E-Type standing side-by-side. The reason why the E-Type running gear is used on the replicas then became clear. If you crash an E-Type, it is relatively easy to replace the section of the bolted up frame but because the D-Type frame is one piece bolted to the monocoque, the entire chassis has to be replaced and these days this will cost about £2000.

In its day the D-Type was remarkably advanced on several counts. It had rack and pinion steering as standard, and it had disc brakes all round — an unheard of gimmick at that time in the early 50's. Each caliper contained six pads which were extremely thick and designed to last an entire 24-hours at Le Mans. The car also possessed double wishbone suspension and didn't utilize a single rose joint, although they were available. Jaguar considered them unreliable and likely to break-up easily.

Hanging on the wall was a D-Type chassis with most of the ancillaries forlorn in a heap beneath it. The parts originated from a glassfibre car built as a one-off exercise by Jaguar. The new owner has asked Lynx to build this into a metal-bodied vehicle, which, apart from being exactly what he has always wanted, will incidentally also raise the value of the car. The old bodyshell is lying out in the yard, at present unwanted.

When building machines like these, a line has to be drawn between originality and durability, so everything is scrupulously cleaned, some parts are shot-blasted and some are stove enamelled as well. That is where it stops. There is no unnecessary chrome plating or special finishes just for the sake of appearance. Many of the completed cars win Concours prizes year after year and some are now in private museums, although Lynx cannot claim that one of their creations found its way to the Schlumpf collection.

One of the major problems with car restoration is the sheer cost of the project and for this reason no car is restored for stock in the hope that someone will buy it. All the work is ordered and labour rates currently amount to about £5 an hour, compared with £6-£7 in an average garage.

"It cost a lot of money to set-up the business" said Guy, "We treat our work primarily as a business, rather than a subsidised hobby and by trying to achieve high standards we have steadily grown over the years. Although we have a very large turnover, the financial rewards are not as great as people think; but we do obtain incredible satisfaction working on these rather unusual motor cars. We have been fortunate in that there just happened to be a gap that needed to be filled by someone.

"One thing we have to do is carry a multitude of spare parts. We had 500 brake pads made up, specially by Ferodo for D-type Jaguars, and we thought we would never sell them all, but now we have only four sets left. Among other things we manufacture a vane-type super-charger for pre-war engines which externally is a perfect replica of the Cozette. I have had to redesign the interior a little to make them more reliable and economical but they still cost nearly £600 and we make them in batches of 10, which seem to go in about a year".

Although this may seem like the end of the rainbow for most early Jaguar enthusiasts, Lynx have a great problem collecting enough parts.



"If anything comes on the market, then we buy it" continued Guy. "We used to advertise, but now people come to us, and we often buy regardless of price — we have to because we look after so many C and D type Jaguars.

"With parts in short supply we have to make up as many as possible. Everything we do is an exact replica and we have a large number of Jaguar drawings. When there were no more parts available they used to supply us with the drawings but now, 20 years after they made the cars, they have suddenly decided that the designs are secret. They have become rather uncooperative.

Fairly recently they threw out a large quantity of D-Type spares. They know we restore their cars, but no-one said anything to us and all the parts were scrapped.

"You can telephone them and say you know they have a particular spare in the stores and you want to buy it. When you say it is for a D-Type there is rustle of paper and mumbblings about not making them any- more, and are you sure you don't mean XJS, or something. It is incredibly frustrating.

"I believe it is Leyland Cars which has destroyed the soul of the firm, and now all the people who were interested seem to have left together with the spares. They sell the spares to a scrap yard which then isn't allowed to re-sell them. It is pitiful, because you could see them cutting up new E-Type bodies which people are falling over themselves to buy!

"In the last few months we have had a problem over the name Lynx, because Leyland Cars wanted to produce a machine called the Lynx, which was apparently a four seater version of the TR7. Now they allow us to make a limited number of cars a year in that name, which is fine by us.

"In the future we would like to make an exotic car of our own design, rather than a replica of someone elses".

In the stores Lynx have the G- Type Jensen project which never got off the ground because the company went bust. The car is a fabulous gull wing- coupe designed by Bill Town, designer of the Aston-Martin Lagonda.

To power this, Guy originally bought a V12 3-litre project from his old firm, Weslake, out of sheer devilment. In all there are three ready-to-run engines, and enough spare parts for five more. But, if they do make their up-market £40,000 car they will, initially at least, use Jaguar VI 2 running gear.



Ford showed interested in the V-12 project, as they saw it as a replacement for the DPV V-8, so it is believed they put in about 10 per cent of the money, and then dropped out for various reasons. Weslake had already spent so much on the engine that they had exhausted all available funds, and everything ground to a halt.

It could, perhaps, be a Grand Prix winning engine, but Lynx do not have the capacity to develop it. So, for the time being at least one engine will be fitted to Guy's F1 March which he will use on the occasional hill climb.

"As for the future", said Guy, "I feel Lynx has grown enough, and if it expands any more the interest will be lost. It started as a hobby and grew into an enjoyable job. If it loses its appeal, then I will just walk away and do something else, like making aeroplanes for instance.

He has already got plans for that too. On a recent trip to the United States he bought several Sopwith Pup engines and has already bought the construction plans, so perhaps we will be seeing a Lynx Pup in the future . . . whatever next?