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THE CLASSIC RESTORERS by Gordon Cruickshank

As famous for improving new cars as for its reproductions of a great fifties sports-racer, Lynx also restores and maintains some of the rarest racing Jaguars. but, as Gordon Cruickshank discovers, it doesn't have to come from Coventry to be sent here.



The name on the front wall gives a pretty clear hint as to the firm's long-time allegiance - Lynx, Jaguar, both elegant big cats. Certainly, the Coventry marque is what comes to mind when the Sussex company is mentioned. But inside the green-painted building on a Hastings industrial estate there's plenty going on not graced by the Leaping Cat.

Unlike the restoration companies featured so far in this series, Lynx is also a manufacturer and converter of new cars. Founded in 1968, it attracted attention with the Spyder, a convertible XJ-S which beat Jaguar to the market by some years, then made a real impact in 1982 with the Eventer, the sensationally attractive estate version of the same vehicle. They continued to build that practical supercar throughout the life of the XJ-S, and in fact there might

be one more to come. But it is a far less sensible machine which famously waves the flag for Lynx.

If you see a Jaguar D-type inside the paddock at a historic meeting, it's bound to be real; if you see one outside the paddock, it might be a Lynx. These very close copies of the great Le Mans racer are built in the same way as their Jaguar brethren (square-section steel frames and aluminium monocoque) but can incorporate your choice of modern conveniences - independent rear suspension, tractable engine, modern electrics and lights.

Or you could have an XKSS, with screen and skimpy hood, for those trips to the Sarthe. Outrageous con, or an understandable way of spreading pleasure? You decide. Certainly Lynx's owner, John Mayston-Taylor, is clear that these are Lynxes, not Jaguars. After all, he doesn't want Coventry stealing his thunder.

Lynx built its first D in 1974, at a time when the real thing was appreciated but not outrageously valuable. Lynx, already involved in maintaining both pre- and post-war sportscars, felt that keen D-type owners who found them impractical for road use with their hard-riding live axle would enjoy a development using E-type rear suspension. The total has now reached 42 - which makes a Lynx D rarer than a Jaguar D - and John tells me with a wry grin that he occasionally sees other D copies being advertised as Lynx versions. An ironic compliment, and a pointless one, he assures me, as all Lynxes are identified both visibly and invisibly. But it will never be a common vehicle. Because you can't race it as a historic, it is purely a road-going indulgence, and with prices starting at £120,000, potential buyers will also be looking at a Ferrari or Porsche.

In parallel, Lynx does ever more work on original D-types, including some major reconstructions. Many Ds are raced, and inevitably need replacement parts which as often as not come straight off Lynx's shelves.

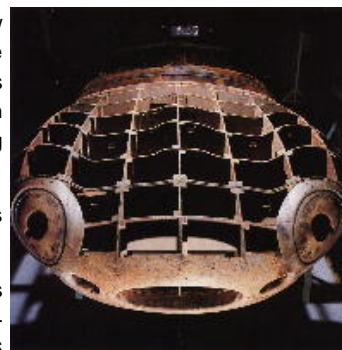
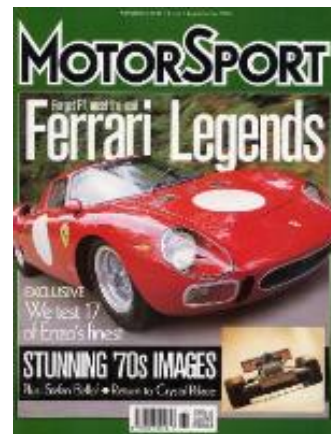


From their catalogue you can select almost anything Browns Lane ever offered for XK engines, from manifolds through wide-angle heads to the amazing slide-throttle set-up with its 76 needle-roller bearings and Lucas mechanical fuel injection. The latter is a Lynx speciality: "Our engine man Tim Card must be a world expert on the Lucas system - he has rebuilt five of the 12 Lightweight engines." And those archetypal Dunlop alloy wheels sported by any self-respecting racing Jaguar are likely to come from Lynx, who machine them from blank pressings and destruction- test one in every 20. Of course, there are some of us who think a C-type is prettier than a D, and Lynx can build that too (with live axle), as well as a slinky low-drag E Coupe based on the Lindner/Nocker car.

Mayston-Taylor's involvement with Lynx goes back further than his ownership. His father had a habit of collecting XK Jaguars, and brought them to Hastings for attention. But at

the beginning of the 1990s it was plain that the company had been seduced by the boom years into overexpansion, and was wallowing in the consequent bust. Unfulfilled orders filled the books, and unfinished cars filled the workshop.

John bought the firm from the receivers in 1992, and with his strict management approach, rationalised things, paired cars with customers, and streamlined the firm. "Because I'd been abroad I hadn't seen the bubble at its peak, so I wasn't daunted by the aftermath." From a maximum of 55 people then, Lynx today employs 19 staff, with an average of 14 years in the business, and there is a firm limit of one year on any project, whether a D-type build-up or a bare-metal restoration.





This even applied to Lynx's biggest restoration project - the gorgeous Ecurie Ecosse transporter. When regular customer Dick Skipworth was looking for something to carry his D-types in, Mayston-Taylor suggested this famous vehicle, which he knew had been saved from scrap by Roger Ludgate, one of the founders of Lynx. Once the deal was done, the huge and derelict truck was squeezed into the workshop - "we had to remove a staircase to do it!" Although it looked an overwhelming marathon of riveting and joinery, a full-time team of five completed the job in an amazing seven months. The result is a perpetual crowd-pleaser wherever it goes, especially when loaded with Skipworth's collection of Ecurie Ecosse Cs, Ds and Tojeiro-Jaguar.



Mayston-Taylor is proud of their 'project management' approach, in which each project has a manager charged with making it happen on schedule, and with keeping clients abreast of progress. "Clients deserve the peace of mind of knowing the schedule," he says; it would seem like a sales sound bite if you didn't know that he has been a customer. "But," he adds, "they need to take responsibility, too; keeping on top of the project, making choices where we find historical options."

Not that it's always left to the customer: "We try to discourage buyers from doing anything to a car for the first three months until they get to know it. And we'll often dissuade them from removing period mods - they're part of the history - especially on '70s cars. They're in limbo now; not terrifically old and significant, but they will be. So we have had to persuade the odd client not to have an interesting car stripped of its past to gain points at Pebble Beach."

Recording what's been done also matters to Mayston-Taylor, who describes himself as "quite studious - I'll do a lot of research before a project. We take probably a roll of film a day, so we end with hundreds of shots on each job. Apart from showing the client what we've done, it means anyone else working on the car knows what was done when."

The same applies to the racing cars, where every race and repair detail is recorded. "Manual data-logging," laughs John.

Having been a racer, Mayston-Taylor reckons this made him sensitive to deadlines: "They won't postpone the race if your car's not ready." It also allows him to set up a racing car for the client who is only going to enter a few events and can't be around for testing. And, as the boss tactfully points out,



most of their clients have come late to racing and appreciate some help.



Race prep forms an increasing part of Lynx's remit: apart from the Lightweights, the firm now runs a GT40 for a customer. It's another rediscovery: bought new by Yamaha in 1968 with a view to future racing projects, it has remained in private collections in Japan until very recently. Now it has begun its track career after a 30-year warm-up, and it brings a new aspect to their sport. "It's a pure race car, unlike the Es which are, in the end, modified road cars," he says.

For racing cars, there will always be work to do, but as we admire an SS100 cowl, invisibly patched, being refitted to its chassis, Mayston-Taylor muses: "This is probably the last major restoration this car will ever need." Elsewhere sits a varied row of machinery: a Ferrari F50 having some suspension mods, an LG45 Lagonda being refurbished, and two Aston Martins, a DB4GT and a Virage whose owner feels its already tuned 7-litre engine is inadequate. Lynx is currently adding a turbo and re-engineering the running gear. "We're an engineering company first and foremost, and we value this sort of variety."



Nowadays increasing numbers of enthusiasts have cars purely for track days, and these offer a welcome chance for some engineering ingenuity. Like the dark green V12 E-type in front of us: lowered and bumperless, with its massive fuel-injected engine manoeuvred a full foot backwards in the chassis, it combines 650bhp with full cockpit trim. Ideal for some weekend kicks.



Lynx may not be all Jaguar, but there can't be anywhere else this side of the Goodwood paddock you'd see three (well, three-and-a-half, actually) Lightweight Es parked in a row: the Phil Scragg car with its fat arches, a Briggs Cunningham Le Mans entry and the recently rediscovered US car. "That was more a re-commissioning than a restoration," says Mayston-Taylor. "It was so original - it still had 1960s race grime on it. We masked the old stickers when we washed it, and where we had to repair we blended flatted paint in rather than respray it" He points with pride to original wiring and electrics. "This is the benchmark Lightweight - the only one still as it left Jaguar. And it even feels like a new car. The others all feel like the well-used racing cars they are." And the half lightweight? Cunningham's first E-type racer, following the E2A Le Mans experiment, and the prototype for all the lightweights. This place

really is a working museum of Jaguars.