



SPORTING CARS - August/September 1983

FAREWELL TO ARMS by Philip Young

The Editor on the passing of a notable Jaguar renaissance.



IT SEEMS on the first hand to be almost impossible to believe. . . the shrine of Jaguar's mightiest sports car at Lynx Engineering are building their final example of the born-again D-Type.

Even the tiny workforce of highly specialised builders, who have applied their craftsmanship for seven years in proving that for a car so great as the D-Type there is such a thing as mechanical life after death, are today at the point of grief with the news.

But the sad fact of life is that the Lynx D-Type, which Guy Black created around Lynx Engineering — a firm initially set up just to specialise in the D-Type — could not expect to continue to lead a renaissance forever.

Guy always knew that there would only be a small handful of enthusiasts in the World who could share his passion for the legend, and shell out enough to buy one. Time moves on, and Lynx Engineering have grown into new premises in St Leonard's on the outskirts of Hastings. And Guy's interests have also marched on .he is now deeply into the aeronautical D-Type of the skies . . . the Spitfire, and is busy on a massive Spitfire restoration. It is an enormous project, and one that could perhaps eventually lead to a sort of "Lynx Spitfire".

We have dropped in on the odd occasion, as we have passed by there was one time a few months ago when it was impossible to prise Guy off the telephone — he was negotiating hard for several chests of aircraft nuts and bolts! Whenever we have visited the place we have always been stunned by the number of genuine D-Types lying around the workshops. When you consider just how few were made in the first place .we dropped in a few weeks ago and found five genuine D-Types being serviced.

Recently Guy extended a very rare privilege in allowing us to take a Lynx D-Type home, and run it for a few days. It was not just any old D-Type, or a factory hack, but a customer's car, and actually up for sale. It was the second Lynx D-Type made.



That glorious noise of a Jaguar's six, baying up the long hill out of St Leonard's as the evening sun flicked through the trees, the wind rushing over that oh so distinctive body, zapping the forehead as it whipped over the narrow wrap-round sheet of Perspex, were initial sensations that instantly etched deep into the memory as we eased the precious jewel up and across East Sussex. How could Lynx give up such a marvelous gem?

The reasoning is simple. The demand for other examples of initiative from Lynx Engineering has now forced them to close the building of their beloved D. It is a sad day all

round, with none more sad than Guy Black. But he has to live for the future, not just in the past. The fact is that two years ago he announced a clever soft-top conversion of the XJS .an open Jaguar was back! The conversion has been a resounding success, and reputation for the engineering integrity behind it has grown Worldwide. So great is the demand for the XJS convertible that it became necessary to have a total re-think.



Then Lynx found that there was a market for their 'Eventer', the sporting estate conversion of the XJS. With its longer roofline and rear hatch, the whole thing looks so 'one-piece' it could almost have been thought up when the shape of the XJS was first conceived. The 'Eventer' is selling strongly, demand for the convertible is growing rapidly, interest and inquiries are now at an all-time high. Coupled with this growth has been the escalation in costs of the E-Type 'donor' used to form the Lynx D-Type . . . plus the cost of other E and D bits that go into each creation. Lynx have for some time been interested in selling to interested parties a 'glorified kit', for anyone competent enough to build their own D. The Lynx D-Type body comes from R.S. Panels, although Lynx have a jig and could make their own. So Lynx will continue to sell the D-Type as a kit along with all their 'know-how'. But they are not going to make anymore themselves. They have built 30, and when the present half-finished Lynx D-Type fires up, it will be the last to be built by this talented bunch of craftsmen.



The do-it-yourself Lynx D costs the thick end of £16,000, and if you consider a Lynx built car to be desirable for your garage, then the last one will cost around something of twice this order. Costs have risen . . . but at least, like the original, a Lynx D is now going to keep its rarity value.



We treated 'ours' to three days of total respect, so it is with just a tinge of regret that we are unable to bring standing-start figures, or top speeds, because we said at the outset that there was no way we intended to treat a customer's car, and one up for sale, to the rigours of that kind of road test. When we drove it out to Penshurst Place at the back of Tunbridge Wells, through narrow country roads, the D was held on a tight leash.

This was to be a photographic mission — and that's all. The D trickled round blind corners at less than 10mph in top, snick it down to third, let it pull . . . blast off. Suddenly, it would answer the call and respond with an electrifying stab in the kidneys and hit 50mph in no time at all, and then it was hauled back again. It was equally just as impressive at burbling along at no speed at all as it was in demonstrating a full charge. It is so tractable. We even took concern should long blades of grass hanging from high banks mark the paintwork.

But when it was opened up, it certainly would fly . It is doubtful if we ever topped more than 100mph in this car, which is probably about 60mph below its ultimate potential.

It is not geared as highly as the Le Mans examples, which would top 180mph, and proved to be the fastest car on the Mulsanne straight for many years after the D-Type was retired by the factory, well into the 1960s!



It was built with a single purpose that consumed all who were involved . . . to win Le Mans, using as many production based Jaguar parts as possible. That classic body of Malcolm Sayer was a masterpiece in helping the car with arrow-straight directness down Mulsanne, the curves still look strikingly handsome today. It was not built at all "for looks", for every curve had a purpose — the RAF wind tunnel revealed, for instance, that even the white circle painted on the bonnet could take off four-miles-an-hour at 160mph if it was not applied in the right way.

The D was a truly magnificent car, for in following up Jaguar's outright wins at Le Mans with the C-Type, it provided Coventry with three outright victories. It is because of the D-Type that the factory are having so much heartache today over their racing programme — Jaguar have so much to live up to should they take the plunge and enjoy a crack at next year's Le Mans . . . which seems a tantalising possibility.

Stirling Moss has said that he much preferred an Aston for any course that called upon handling and cornering abilities, rather than a D-Type — he set out his reasoning in the last edition of Collector's Car magazine. The Lynx is notably different from its original, in using the independent rear suspension of the E-Type base car, but even with this it is a very firm and bumpy ride on anything but a smooth surface. It made us think of what it must have been like to race for 24 hours, full tilt, with a lot more power than we had available, with much poorer rubber than we were riding on . . .

And what must have it been like to race one handed, like Archie Scott Brown?

Before taking to rallying Healey's, Timo Makinen used to race a D-Type in Finland, on the ice of frozen lakes! He once said "Because of Jaguar D-Type, when I get in Healey rally car, it is home!" All we can say to that is thank goodness it wasn't snowing when we borrowed the Lynx. For pottering along, interspersed with sharp high speed blasts on a bright summers day, the Lynx-D proved to be a seventh heaven. It was all commendably so well balanced, even though Lynx explained that our particular example carried a shade more oversteer than normal. It would offer a reassuring trace of understeer as part of the package for effortless straight stability. It would corner on the throttle and power around open bends, its angle of attack adjusted instantly by the right foot, it would drift a little . and then at the point of biting, call for a shade of opposite lock, and if combined with an instant lifting off of power — not too much — just a fraction will do, the D commands immediately. It is a highly responsive thoroughbred.

It will tremor and bump like a good many period machines, but the manner of its going is a wonderful magic to behold. Firing those triple Webers into life first thing in the morning .. and proudly returning 'our' D back to the factory in exactly the same condition as we borrowed it, was all part of the charm of three days of driving. Something so special it is certainly best kept a rarity.

By ending their production to concentrate on XJS conversions Lynx are keeping the D-Type sensation very exclusive.

