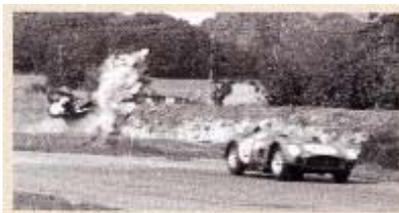




Classic & Sports Car - January 1995

NONE BUT THE BRAVE by Mick Walsh



More famous for a huge shunt at Goodwood than its race performance, this dramatic Ecurie Ecosse Tojeiro Jaguar deserved better. Mick Walsh retraces its fated path

The low, curvaceous machine sped around the challenging turns of Madgwick, Fordwater, St Mary's, Lavant and Woodcote, its hard, distinctive bark clearly indicating Jaguar power. The winter sun glinted through a line of threadbare birch trees on a blissful

Goodwood day as this metallic blue beauty blasted on for another lap. Only a full-face helmet interrupted the vintage scene.

Obviously bred in the glorious '50s, this curvaceous racer's profile was a slightly unbalanced combination of Costin Lister with a finned, D-type style head fairing; but its long broad snout, muscular sides, low wraparound screen and hunched back could only belong to one car - the Tojeiro Jaguar.

Remembered almost solely for a huge shunt at this very circuit - its spaceframe folded like cardboard when it hit the unforgiving Woodcote bank - the 'Toj' has, 35 years later, been restored to superb fettle. One of the last British open, front-engined sports prototypes, it was commissioned by Ecurie Ecosse to replace its ageing D-types, as the age of the factory-built, lightweight coupe dawned.

I turned a blind eye to the modern formula cars present and wallowed in a morning of dazzling metallic blue nostalgia. Lynx, which looks after the car, had even brought along the famous Ecurie Ecosse Commer transporter. As I changed into my shamelessly modern Nomex race suit inside the famous custom cabin, I glanced at wall mounted mementoes of the good days - a spinner from a Le Mans-winning D-type, a display case of black Bakelite mugs and a framed photo of the unique commercial I was hunched up inside. Even without Scottish accents, the mood was marvellously authentic.

Then came my opportunity to try this infamous Tojeiro. With window sides unclipped and the door folded down, I stepped uneasily into the cabin. The Scottish team's years of endurance racing experience ensured the seating was expertly tailored for a relaxed driving position, a great improvement on the flat-floor character of a Lister. Crackle black dash finish, WW2 switchgear, bold rev counter, three-spoke, wood-rimmed, D-type steering wheel and short polished-steel gearlever all lend to the functional British aura. The flat-topped bonnet bulge dominates the view ahead through the distorted Perspex screen, while the wings have none of shapely contours of a Lister or D-type.

Out on the track, the Tojeiro couldn't feel more removed from these other racing Jaguars. As the powerful twin-cam 'six' let rip, there was no doubt about the Tojeiro's brutal acceleration. I sliced the gearbox up the gears and we rocketed to Madgwick for the first time. Vision through the screen is hopeless, forcing the driver to peer over it, and the alloy panels chattered noisily as we charged on across the well-worn Goodwood tarmac.

At 15cwt (4cwt less than a D-type) the Tojeiro initially feels nervous and twitchy. I soon realised it begs precise commands and a smooth style - in complete contrast to the bravado a D-type so enjoys. The unservoed brakes are inspiring and the steering quick, sharp and perfectly weighted. Only at the chicane did my wrists have to twist to hustle it through, but after a few laps, confidence built enough to powerslide out on the throttle.

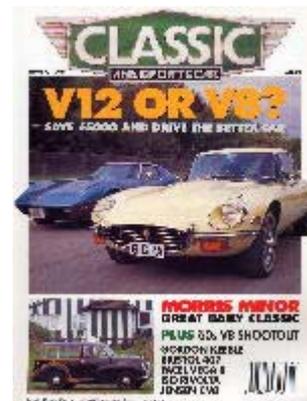
Most frustrating was the tall 3.54:1 diff ratio which didn't help as I tried to discover the challenging lines of Goodwood's famous curves. Lynx boss John Mayston-Taylor knows the track well and later really got the Tojeiro motoring: "It's a car in which you slowly build your confidence. Like a formula car, it has a delicate balance of grip and handling but, once you get over those nervous first impressions, the car's cornering speed, particularly into bends, is quicker than a D-type and far less theatrical. It's precise fingertip control rather than fists of opposite lock."

Stories of alarming bump-steer, too much roll, and even its reputation for worrying lift are certainly now cured and the Lynx team is confident the Tojeiro has huge potential, particularly with modern suspension know-how. I hope Lynx has the confidence to take it racing and finally eradicate its poor reputation.

The Tojeiro was Ecurie Ecosse's hopeful replacement for its loyal but outdated D-types. With the new 3-litre capacity limit, a competitive entry needed a lighter chassis and more advanced suspension. The loan from John Ogier of one of John Tojeiro's earlier cars, the Jaguar-powered '2 GNO', resulted in some encouraging performances: the team ordered a new car from the Royston chassis specialist.



A multi-tube spaceframe carried double wishbones and rack and pinion steering at the front and a de Dion axle located on parallel trailing arms and a Watt linkage at the rear. Together with help from Ecosse mechanic Stan Sprout, Tojeiro assembled the car from scratch in his cramped workshop. As with previous Tojeiros, artist and racing enthusiast Cavendish Morton designed the body. His bold sketches were translated into shapely alloy by Williams & Pritchard. Morton's work was not as naive as is often reported and the Cambridge University wind tunnel was accessed to test his models. By mid-summer of 1959 the rolling chassis and body were transferred to the team's Edinburgh base for completion. Despite the haste with which it had been built, the new car was on the pace at Le Mans practice. Registered RSF 301 (borrowed from the team's D-type) and





painted in the traditional flag metallic blue with a single white nose stripe, it was driven by Ron Flockhart and 'Jock' Lawrence. While Ferrari and Aston battled it out during Wednesday's practice, the Tojeiro was soon sidelined with rear suspension problems. Spare parts were aboard the transporter which had broken down returning from the 'Ring.

Early on Thursday morning, Ron Flockhart took off in his Auster with John Tojeiro and an Ecosse mechanic to bring back the required spares. Meanwhile, during the second practice that day, Masten Gregory boosted the team's spirits with a blistering lap time of 4 mins 9.7 secs in a D-type, comparing well to Ferrari's best of 4 mins 3.3 secs by Gurney.

When it was finally ready, Lawrence was quickest in the Tojeiro with a best time of 4 mins 12 secs. In the race, it was more competitive. After heading the starting line up with a pair of works Listers, Flockhart flashed by the pits after the crowded first lap in sixth, behind Moss (Aston), Gendebien and da Silva Ramos (Ferraris), Ireland (Ecosse D-type) and Trintignant (Aston). During the early hours of the race, the Ecosse settled into fifth and sixth, headed by Ireland's D-type, happy to watch the Aston/Ferrari drama ahead as the clouds darkened, promising rain.

After 32 laps Lawrence took over and continued to hold sixth as the first Jaguar engines let go under the strain. Into the dark hours, first the Listers blew up and then Ecosse's own D-type failed to make the midnight hour with top end problems. The Bueb/Halford/Lister went out in the ninth hour leaving the Tojeiro. Once running as high as fourth and never lower than seventh, the sole Jaguar-powered car in the race. All in the Ecosse pits had fingers crossed that its high-compression, 3-litre engine would last. But the lap charts reveal ominous 6 min times and, after the 125th lap, Lawrence brought the Tojeiro in with tell-tale overheating. With water added, Flockhart took over, but just 10 laps later, at around 3am, the engine blew out a core plug.



Stan Sprout, then Ecurie Ecosse's chief mechanic was never confident that the stroked 2.4-litre engine would last: "The compression was far too high. When we bench-tested it, it was blowing out water. 'Wilkie' Wilkinson insisted it would be OK. After it ran out of water they just drove it into the ground. Its insides melted, the head distorted, pistons fused, the bottom end seized. It was the worst-damaged engine I ever saw."

Although the record books show a DNF for the car's first outing, it had by no means disgraced itself. Back at the works, a new 'tall-block' engine (a de-stroked 3.4-litre) was fitted, and the shapely bonnet was modified with a power bulge. In this guise the car was entered for the Tourist Trophy at Goodwood on September 5 1959.

Ecurie Ecosse had an expensive intervening month, in particular the sports car race supporting the British GP at Aintree. In dreadful wet conditions, with two laps to go, Flockhart in Toj III collided with the team's Lister which Peter Blond had just spun. Neither driver was hurt but both Ecosse cars were extensively shunted.

Then came the fated Goodwood event for RSF 301. On loan from the rival Scottish team Border Reivers was a 23-year-old in just his fourth season - Jimmy Clark. Rather more experienced - particularly with accidents - was his Kansas-born team-mate Masten Gregory. Clearly there was a keen rivalry between these two very quick drivers: practice timesheets verify this. Gregory was first out at Goodwood on the Thursday and after 15 laps and one pit stop to check tyre pressures he settled for a best of 1 min 38.5 secs. The flying Scot was more consistent with a quickest of 1 min 39 secs and the run-up to the race saw the two aces push down the lap times despite their misgivings about the challenging handling.

Eventually Clark set a flyer at 1 min 35.6secs which put them an ominous 13th quickest. Maestro Moss was on outstanding form and with the championship-hungry Aston DBR1 set a blistering 1 min 31.4 secs pole. But the writing was on the wall for all the hairy Jaguar specials, even on the fast straights of the Westhampnett airfield circuit. Although the works Astons and Ferraris set the ultimate pace, the nifty Climax Lotuses, Lolas and Coopers were hustling all the big-bangers. Graham Hill even set fourth fastest with a bold 1 min 33 secs for a very chuffed Mr Chapman! The age of the 'artist designers' with their powerful back-street specials had clearly ended.

Race day was hot and sunny with a cool breeze taking the edge off the heat. Crowds packed into Goodwood hopeful of an Aston victory and world championship glory. They were not disappointed, despite fireworks in the Feltham team's pit.



Ecurie Ecosse was less happy. The race started well enough, with Clark settling down to ninth place and, despite his misgivings about the car's on-the-limit handling, the young Scot clearly revelled in the opportunity to chase his schoolday idols. At 4pm, after five hours' racing, the Tojeiro was up to seventh, when Clark handed over to Gregory for the final time.

During the nine-minute pitstop Autosport reported that the steering was checked. Several laps later Gregory went missing after charging Woodcote terminally fast. Ferrari works driver Oliver Gendebien recalled the moment vividly: "I was braking for Woodcote and, out of the corner of my eye, I saw a blue car come alongside me. I couldn't believe anyone would overtake me on the outside at this spot. I glanced over - I couldn't believe my eyes. Masten was clearly struggling to stand up on the seat. The car shot across the track and hit the bank very fast."

To this day no-one has confirmed a mechanical problem. Brake or steering failure has been suggested but more likely is that Gregory was simply driving over the limit and misjudged the double apex bend at the end of the ultra-fast Lavant Straight. Having shunted two other Ecosse team cars, he clearly feared being trapped inside the spaceframe as it folded, and so prepared himself for take-off. As the Tojeiro hit the bank, Masten jettisoned like a stuntman. Spectators reported the human cannonball reached an altitude of 15ft before a lucky landing with just a broken collarbone.



Designer John Tojeiro was understandably concerned about reports of a chassis failure, and in a letter to Ecurie Ecosse team founder, the enthusiastic Edinburgh accountant David Murray, he questioned Gregory's report that the steering had come adrift and cut a brake hose. This simply was not possible as the brake pipes were ahead of the axle line and there was no evidence of the wheels going onto excessive lock before the accident.

Clark's memories of the car were by no means favourable and are included in Doug Nye's fascinating book *Powered by Jaguar*. "The Tojeiro we drove was a long, ugly-looking car and it didn't handle as well as our own Reivers car (the 'Flat Iron' Lister, HCH 736). Somehow it seemed to get up on tip-toe going through Madgwick (the tricky fast right-hander after the start) and it was decidedly light to handle in places. It was quite twitchy through the chicane.' Such reservations didn't however stop the brilliant Scot, and Masten, playing to the crowd at this point with dramatic opposite lock displays.

Photo evidence at the TT confirms Clark's alarm. Through Goodwood's fast sweepers, the car looks light in an alarming suspended stance. With Clark's head raked back in the airstream, the Tojeiro's wide body rolling over and an understeering inside front wheel clipping the dusty apex, the car looks a real handful.

As the other Tojeiro Jaguars went on to racing success in the New Zealand Springbok series and starring roles in MGM's *The Green Helmet*, the wreck of RSF 301 languished in Ecurie Ecosse's workshop. The 1960 season saw the team campaign two D-types for a final year before turning its attention to another ambitious project, the Tojeiro Climax coupes.

By the mid-'60s, Ecurie Ecosse boss David Murray's passion for racing was waning in the light of big financial problems. In 1968 he fled to the Canary Islands, a broken man. What remained of the team's cars and parts was saved by a few enterprising enthusiasts who remembered the good old days.

Thanks to Tojeiro registrar, Gilbert Dickson, the fate of RSF 301's remains took a positive turn. He tracked down a collection of parts to a strange character based in the Scottish borders and finally swapped a Rudge motorcycle for the suspension components, a de Dion tube, drive-shafts, hubs and, most significantly, the tail section of the body. Contact with John Tojeiro rewarded him with a spare 'original' chassis and further components, including a spare bonnet, were tracked down to a Dr Bothwell.

Dickson eventually sold on this 'genuine' kit of parts and it passed through the hands of Peter Bloore to John Harper and Jim Tester, who started the assembly. They commissioned Maurice Gomm of Woking to complete the body using the original tail and the period style bonnet and, in a very much "leaned together" state, the project was acquired by respected restorer Dick Crosthwaite in the early '80s.

At Crosthwaite's, a 293bhp 3.8-litre wide-angle head engine was fitted and, between restoring grand prix Mercs and Auto Unions, the chassis slowly came together. Last year, the finished Tojeiro ran under its own power for the first time in more than 30 years in the yard of Crosthwaite & Gardiner's workshop: "It has huge potential and, when sorted, I'm sure it could find winning form with the right driver," says Crosthwaite. "Unlike a D-type or a Lister where you are very limited with the design, the Tojeiro has tremendous possibilities to hold the road very well. The brakes are strong and whole car is comparatively very light.

"Back in 1959 it was a classic case of 'a day late, a dollar short' and Stan Sprout told us, they were gasping to get it ready for Le Mans."

RSF 301's infamous reputation could soon be forgotten. Passionate Ecurie Ecosse enthusiast Dick Skipworth acquired the car and Lynx, which looks after his cars, has taken steps to resolve its ill handling. It returned to Goodwood in July, appropriately aboard the Ecurie Ecosse transporter, and won its class at an AMOC sprint with a slightly wary John Mayston-Taylor, Lynx's director, at the wheel. The car has since won its class at the Bagatelle concours against the exotic products of Fantuzzi and Scaglietti, which no doubt made artist/stylist 'Cavvy' Morton RA smile. Next year the car will hopefully prove its full potential in historic racing at selected events.

