

# The Cat that followed the Bird

*Dave Bray*

**Jaguar** (-guer, -gwer) n. **1.** large carnivorous spotted feline (*Panthera onca*) inhabiting some wooded parts of S. & Central America. **2.** large car, one of the most beautiful shapes of all time (XK120 reproduction) inhabiting one of the garages in Papakowhai

At the end of World War 2, this new name appeared in the British car industry, William Lyons adopting it in the realisation that "SS" was by then hardly a desirable name for the future. Despite the pre-war successes of that name in the car world, the Nazi Schulz-Staffel had despoiled it more than a little in the meantime.

During the dark days of war as far back as 1943, several engine designs had been considered while fire-watching up on the roof tops of the factory, and those that proceeded beyond the 'back of the fag packet' stage were designated "X" (for 'experimental').

While initial designs didn't progress very far (XA, XB etc.) the "XJ" was built as a double ohc four-cylinder of 1360cc. "XG" was a development of the Standard Motor Company's 1776cc unit, but failed to deliver enough power, while the "XJ" was a dohc made in both four and six-cylinder form. The four cylinder two-litre version didn't get into production, though fitted into an MG special in 1948 it powered the car to 176mph on test in Belgium.

The 3182cc "XJ" six failed to produce enough torque to impress Lyons, but increasing the stroke, and the capacity to 3442cc gave the world the "XK" - which became the mainstay of Jaguar production for over 40 years.

The aim had been to use this engine to power a new high-performance saloon car due to be launched at the 1948 Earls Court Motor Show, but with the problems involved in getting production up-and-running this didn't eventuate in time, and legend has it that Lyons hastily commissioned a hand-built alloy two seater in which to show off the new motor.

An 'overnight sensation' as the overworked phrase puts it, the demand for this car - known as the XK120 - forced the production of 200 of the alloy versions almost entirely for export, before the car could be built from stamped out steel panels.

Producing 160 bhp in its original form (much more followed later) a stock vehicle using 'pump' petrol of about 69 octane recorded a speed of 126 mph at Jabbeke in Belgium in 1949, making it the fastest production sports car in the world at that time.

Now I believe that most classic car enthusiasts are influenced in our emotional connection with cars and car styles by those which we idolised when in our formative years - the ones which we drew on the back of our school exercise books and so on - and the production years of '48 to '54 makes the XK120 about right for me.

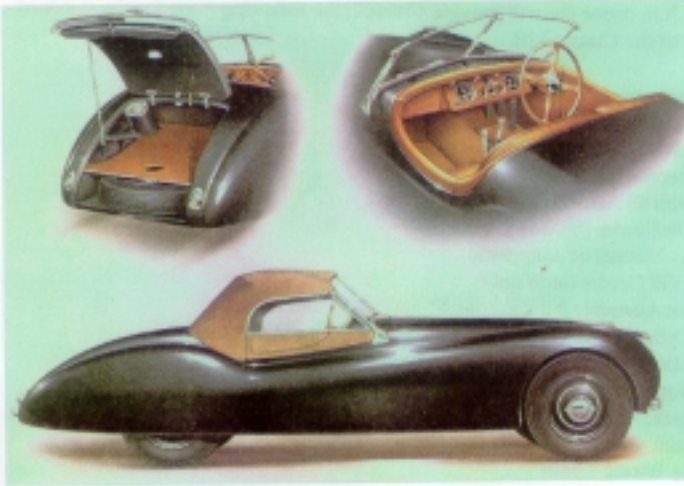
I'm not quite sure how this theory fits in with Alan and the SS100 of the mid-'30s - perhaps he was an early developer? No doubt he'll explain that one.

In our early days in New Zealand back in the '50s, we much admired Sybil Lupp and her racing XK120, and in our own flirtations with classic cars Sandra and I had a Daimler V8 250 for some 12 years - the Jaguar Mk2 body shape - the general lines of which clearly descended from the XK120 and a style which we really admired.

When looking around among many other cars for this latest project we came across the 'Nostalgia' prototype in England and were smitten almost immediately.

Back home again, we deliberated at length before saying 'Sod it!, ordering the essentials from 'Nostalgia' and starting the local hunt for Jaguar parts - which incidentally are significantly cheaper here than they are overseas.

Chassis #...005 arrived here in October 2000, (the first supplied to anyone at all in component form and the only one exported) and we have just put



the first section of body work over these major components:

**Engine** is a 3442 cc "XK" derived from a Mk2 Jaguar (correct size and type for the 120)

**Gearbox** is from a Series 3 Jaguar XJ6 (the flywheel saga is elsewhere in this issue)

**Driveshaft** is half of an XJ6 two-piece, unmodified

**Differential** is a limited slip 3.77:1 from an E-type or a Jaguar 420

**Wheels** are genuine 16" x 5.5" XK120 bought from Bob Smyth (who brought his FHC along to the Club a while back) We still haven't sorted out tyres.

**Brakes** are entirely Jag. Series 3 XJ6 - four-pot ventilated discs at the front, inboard at the rear, power assisted.

**Steering** is XJ6 Jaguar with a Peugeot 205GTI rack-and-pinion

What we are trying to do with this project is to produce a period classic, perhaps British classic of all time, but without the major shortcomings of its period.

Contemporary road tests politely indicated (as road testers do) that the drum brakes were 'adequate' for instance, though race and rally reports of the time clearly showed that most failures to proceed were as a result of brake problems. This includes those where the gearboxes failed through being abused by having to make up for the inadequacies of the brakes.

We have addressed this with modern anchors, and will certainly not be having anything resembling the original's terrifying bullet shaped steering wheel boss facing the driver's chest - even if the Tech. Committee would allow it.

The original cockpit was necessarily short so as to provide adequate arm leverage to muscle around the enormous 17" steering wheel; a 15" wheel and a Peugeot rack-and-pinion set-up makes the test of strength unnecessary, so the cockpit has been discreetly lengthened by a couple of inches.

Seating was originally a quite high two-piece bench, flat and smooth, and with the period body roll and lack of restraints like seat belts, the passenger made regular use of a substantial grab handle; we'll be trying to maintain some equilibrium with modern suspension, three-point inertia reel seat belts, and a pair of bucket seats sourced from a Triumph TR6.

I guess that all this means that we're not turning out a 'replica' or exact copy of an XK120 - it's more something by way of a modernised rendition or perhaps just an external likeness of one.

Either way, it's a tremendously interesting project for a non-technical person like me and I am both grateful and amazed at the extent to which help and advice is available on a seemingly endless basis from the more skilled and able people in this Club of ours.