

Sybil Lupp - The Jaguar Lady

By Neville Barlow

When I was still a boy at school, I started to hear about someone called 'The Jaguar Lady'. It was at this time that my father purchased a Mark 7 Jaguar. Anytime we ventured out in the car people certainly took note of it. When we stopped they would always request Dad to open the bonnet. This car was built for Jaguars famous 3.4 litre twin overhead cam straight 6 cylinder engine. A remarkable piece of engineering for the time.

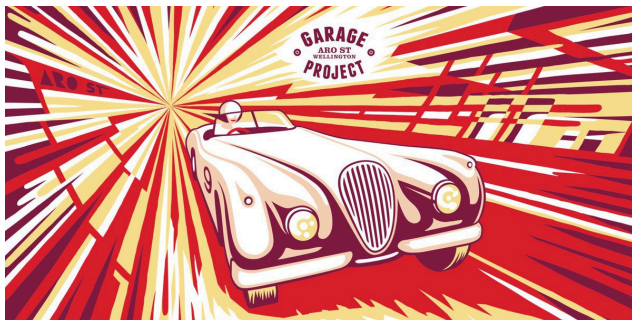
The so called 'Jaguar Lady' specialized in Jaguars. A very rare thing in those days especially for one of the fairer sex. These engines were complicated and to make it worse all the shop manuals made mention of special Jaguar tools that were required. Sybil Lupp was regarded as a Jaguar expert and many owners would only allow her to maintain and tune their cars.

The history of Jaguar has a plethora of amazing people such as Sir William Lyons, Sir Stirling Moss, Norman Dewis and may I include New Zealand's unsung hero Sybil Lupp, 'The Jaguar Lady'.

A local connexion with Sybil was in our December 2017 magazine. It tells about a man called Murray Hodgson, who lives here in Tauranga and is restoring a 1955 Mark 1 2.4 Jaguar. This car was owned by his parents who bought it with Sybil's help and was maintained by her. Murray bought it from his parents, so it has been in the family for 64 years.

Sybil was born in 1916. She showed an aptitude for mechanical things from an early age, preferring model trains and Meccano sets to dolls.

She said "They all laughed when I asked for boys toys, but I used to get them in the end". Sybil competed on ponies at A. & P. Shows, built radio crystal sets, was good at needle work but most of all loved machinery of all types.





At the age of 11 her father taught her to drive and she was forever locked on fast cars. She desired to be a mechanical engineer but that was not considered “lady like”, so she took up a correspondence course in car maintenance. In 1938 she was offered a job at J.G. Ingrams garage. There she met John Morris Charles Lupp, a motor sport enthusiast. They were married in 1939 and Sybil worked as a car saleswoman until her daughter was born in 1940. From September 1941 to September 1944 she served in the N.Z. Women’s Auxiliary Air Force. Her duties included driving and the maintenance of diesel engines.

In June 1945 their son was born. Her husband, John died suddenly in July 1945 and left her with a high debt estate. In 1947 she married John’s brother Percival, and together they founded the Otago Sports Car Club.

Sybil won a number of hill climb and standing start competitions.

In 1949 she was the South Island hill climb champion and 3rd fastest in the 1950 N.Z. champs. In the N.Z Road Racing Championship (later called the Lady Wigram Trophy race) Sybil was 5th out of 22 starters. A year later she finished 2nd and 1st in the handicap section. Her attire was always overalls but believe it or not a dress was worn underneath.

By 1954 she focused on expanding the business. She had always tuned her own cars, particularly high performance cars. Naturally she became involved with Jaguars. The business took her all over the South Island and later in to the North Island, maintaining and selling Jaguars. In 1957 she moved to Wellington and set up her Jaguar Service workshop in a Newton double garage nicknamed 'The Cave'. Working seven days a week, there was still time to meet Lionel George Archer who had been a Jaguar engineer in England. In 1958 they formed a partnership called 'Jag Service'. At one time they employed eight mechanics. The flourishing sales branch was registered as Archer and Lupp in 1966.



The Lupps divorced in 1961 and Sybil married Lionel in April 1969. Rheumatoid Arthritis inhibited her mechanical work so she concentrated on sales. In reluctant retirement the 'Jaguar Lady' enjoyed her 'big cats': a gold 1972 V12 E Type. At age 74 she replaced it with a bright red automatic Le Mans edition XJS. Sybil was Patron of the Wellington MG Car Club and the local Jaguar Drivers Club. On 26th December 1994 she passed away.

Although she made her mark in the male dominated sport, Sybil was always a feminine lady liking modern clothes, cooking and gardening. Vivacious, articulate, assertive and talented, she commanded respect from all her male competitors. Many a story has been told of customers arriving at her workshop to find her in well-worn overalls, either engrossed under the bonnet or her legs sticking out from under a car. A pioneer for women and the name 'Jaguar Lady' always bought a smile to those who knew her.



Neville