

XKR SILVERSTONE

By Bruce Jamieson



In 1997 the long awaited replacement for the legendary E type arrived. Not the F Type but another GT. Like the XJS, many thought it was bit soft - not a proper sports car and definitely not enough under the bonnet with only 290 HP. Jaguar knew it, and that problem was solved the following year with the arrival of the XKR, having an Eaton supercharger fitted to the 4 litre V8, which gave a seamless, smooth power boost. This resulted in 28% extra horsepower and 33% extra torque.

The result being over 1 second faster for ¼ mile standing start, but the big gain was the acceleration to the artificially limited top speed of 255kph. 39 seconds for XKR compared with 105 for the XK8. The XKR required brake and suspension upgrades, and larger wheels to handle the extra power.

There had been requests for a XKR that had better handling and braking, a special something off the showroom floor, something that could be taken on the race track on Sunday and then to the office on Monday. Something built in very limited numbers, and so the "Silverstone" was born.

This job was given to Jaguar Special Vehicles Operations Dept. SVO as Jaguar owners liked to call it. SVO is a closed-door department of the Browns Lane plant. Building vehicles for the Royal Family, VIP's, the funeral industry, plus upgrades on new vehicles to order.

When Jaguar re-entered motor racing in the year 2000, F1 this time, the XKR Silverstone was announced as a promotion for their Motor Racing (or was the motor racing to promote their car production?)

The idea was to take a XKR and build them all identical with a total production run of 100. 50 coupes and 50 convertibles. All to be right hand drive for the local market. These becoming known as Phase One Silverstone's. The upgrades and points of difference had to be very subtle, in the English way. First the paint, a special shade of Platinum Silver, so as to suit the name "Silverstone". It was designed to sit a little lower and have larger wheels, the largest on any production Jaguar at that time - 20" BBS 5 spoke aluminium.

The brakes had to be the biggest and the best, Brembo was chosen, the same as Ferrari were fitting to their cars. 335mm front and 330mm rear discs ventilated and cross drilled for maximum cooling effect. The revolutionary computer active technology suspension CAT, as it became known, was fitted. Springs plus front and rear anti roll bars were updated to make the car sit a little lower as well as firmer when cornering. The steering was also re-tuned to make it quicker and more accurate. Many of these upgrades became standard in later models.

The interior was upgraded to make that point of difference. Charcoal with red stitching on the high back seats with the head rests built in on Phase 1 cars, whereas the Phase 2 cars had separate adjustable electric head rests. Red trim was also around the edges of the black floor mats. The wooden dash was finished in a silver grey, rather than the natural brown of the standard XKR. A small gold "XKR Silverstone" is on the left bottom corner of the dash. The other point of difference, the door sill plates have "Jaguar Silverstone XKR" engraving as coachbuilders of years past. All this came at a price, of course, that is if you were quick enough to get your hands on one.

Part of the sales pitch was to promote Jaguar F1 racing. The sales gimmick was to pick up your car at the Silverstone Race Track and receive a gift pack, which included a full race suit plus helmet, two days driver race lessons and tickets to Jaguar Racing Enclosure wherever Jaguar was racing that season.

When the Silverstone was released, a demand for left hand drive cars from the USA could not be ignored. The following year 2001 another limited production run was made. This time all for export. In total 141 coupes, and 275 convertibles, all left hand drive, plus 42 right hand drive coupes again for export, mainly Japan. These cars were known as the Phase twos.

Our Silverstone which we have owned for 12 years, came from Japan with 22,000kms on the clock. During this time, we have added another 50,000kms. I changed the competition brake pads as I found them not suitable for our daily driving and replaced the Pirelli P Zero tyres, which I found had fantastic grip but didn't wear well on our rough surfaced sealed roads.

According to the research I have done, no Silverstone's were sold as a new car either in Australia or New Zealand. At my last count there are 4 coupes all ex Japan and 1 convertible ex UK.

Bruce