

JAGUAR RACING CARS

A MONTHLY SERIES - Part 3

By Neville Barlow

With the production of his very first Sports Car, William Lyons decided to name them after the top speed they were expected to achieve. In 1935 the SS90 could get to 90 mph and in 1936- 39 the SS100 could top the 100mph with its 3.5 litre guise. This method was carried to the XK120 in 1948. However, that car rather overachieved and the very first edition reached 132 mph.

The XK140 was therefore expected to produce 140mph but that proved a little optimistic with test drivers getting to only 125mph (200kph). It does appear that one modified car did reach 141mph at the famed Jabbeke roadway.



The motive power was similar to the XK120 but the XK140 was 300kgs heavier. The 140 was not promoted as a racing car, the D Type was still occupying that role. In all its models, Roaster, Drop head coupe and Fixed head coupe it was delighting customers in the USA. Jaguar advertised it especially in California as “you can drive with your head in the sun and the wind in your hair”

Some Motoring Journalists have asked the question “Why wasn’t there an XK130? In fact, there was! but there was only one car built with that insignia. It was constructed by the Experimental Department as a test bed and was the very first Jaguar to have Disc



Brakes and the new 3.8 litre engine. There were question asked about the reliability of this engine having been bored out to what was thought to be its maximum. The vehicle looked like a small C Type Jaguar and it had a lightweight body. It has been said the XK130 was thrashed beyond its limit to prove the quality of the following XK140 and XK150.

As was the way at Jaguar in those days it was completely destroyed. It does not exist. What an historic waste. Obviously had it not been for this vehicle the XK140 would now be known as an XK130 and the method of naming would be restored.

The XK140 was introduced in October 1954 and can be identified from the XK120 by its rounded bumpers, similar to the Mark VII, a different radiator grille and it had a new cooling system. It was a better car mechanically. It was powered by the XK120 special equipment engine as standard giving 180bhp or the high compression of the C Type head, producing 220bhp.

The Roadster and the Drop head coupes had their bulkhead moved 3 inches forward to allow more leg room and to provide a more comfortable driving position. It also had a better weight distribution and better handling. There was also the provision of 2 small rear seats.



The XK140 took over the mantle of fastest Production car in the world. It was one of the few cars of its day that could reach 100mph comfortably in under 30 seconds. It was also known for its reliability. Later models had the option of Automatic Transmission that was dear to the hearts of customers in America who obviously regarded and used it as a touring car rather than a racer. Because of its generous fuel consumption and it being priced at a very much lower price than its competition, it was a fine advertisement for the British Motor Industry. It came out at the same time as the small compact Mark 1 saloon which was having rave reviews, and the D Type was still winning at Le Mans. A tough act to follow. However, the Americans thought the XK120 was old hat, so they had a new toy to play with.

William Lyons was well aware that the viability of his company was built on selling saloon cars. A very tight financial situation meant that he was not inclined to support Sports Car racing as in the past. Therefore very few XK140s were raced.

RACING

According to the most accurate figures I can obtain for the XK140, were that they started in 714 races, finishing in 573, from 1955 to 1966. They had 44 wins, 52 seconds and 58 thirds. Most of these races were in the USA at places such as, Thompsons, Santa Barbara, Palm Springs, Watkins Glen and Lime Rock.

In 1956 an XK140 ran in the Le Mans 24 hour race. It finished and was not disgraced. Also, in that year the French driver Georges Guyot completed the Mille Miglia 1000kms for a class win. The Appleyards competed in the Alpine Rally. Serious competitors raced their XK140 in such races as the Tulip and RAC rallies with many places and class wins but this model was destined to never win a major event.



David Hobbs was a highly rated motor car racer who was born in 1939. He became an International figure driving everything from saloons to Formula One. He was an apprentice at Jaguar. One of his first race drives was in his father XK140. Unfortunately he ended upside down in a ditch but was not injured, thanks to the sturdy build of the car. He learnt an early lesson at an early age, to where the limits of fast driving was!

The famed author Nevil Shute, who wrote "On the Beach" (his real name was Neville Norway) raced at Phillip Island in Australia in his RHD XK140 Roadster which was one of only 5 RHD imported into Australia, out of only 74 ever made.

The 10th RHD Coupe ever made was a show car in 1955 but in 1959 it competed in its first Targa in Tasmania. Driven by Brian Titherode it came in 3rd. In following years he recorded a 1st in class and 2nd overall. In 2006 after 6 days of racing and 2500 miles, without a drop of oil lost, he finished 3rd in the Prologue and 1st in class.

Lionel Walker with his Roadster won his class in the Australian National Concours in 1972, 1973, and 1974.

Racing in New Zealand

Angus Hyslop raced an XK140 in Hill climbs in April 1956. It was the first XK140 to be seen in competition in the North Island.

In 1957 on the 12th of January on Grand Prix day at Ardmore Frank Cantwell in his XK140 won the Saloon Car Race and won again at Wigram also in January. On the 14th of February Cantwell was 2nd in a Handicap race at Ryal Bush in Southland.



In June he was at it again winning a Sports Car Handicap with Roy Archibald 3rd in his XK120.

Ted Sweetman raced mainly in Otago and Southland with his XK140 achieving much success. Total wins not recorded. At Pukekohe in 1963 he won the Ultimate Echo Race which was for Production Sports Cars. His car was modified with the

C Type head and a new gearbox. This car was a replica of that used by Jaguar at Jabbeke in Belgium that achieved a top speed of 141.8mph. This is the same modification that our Jaguar club member Tony Johnson car has and it has the certificate on its dash to prove it. Tony has generously sent me a brief story of his Jaguar XK140 which I have included below.

finished sixth in the same race the following year. The result as I was competing with thinly disguised Jags drove to all meetings and competed in full Jags. I had good success at Southland meetings of which I won many sprints and grass track events at various meetings and events. From 1964 the size and weight of the cars was reduced by the very light body sports cars, like Lola and the decision to either go into single seater racing

the Jags drove to meetings in full sports car trim

Ted Sweetman in Pukekohe, 1963



1955 XK140 MC OTS Registration
WG4380

Our hunt for a Jaguar began while living in the USA. Criteria were- red, driveable, 120/140 shape, original as possible with matching numbers, open two-seater and.....



affordable. We checked out cars in New York, Chicago, Arizona, Atlanta and finally read Hemmings October 1966 magazine "XK 140MC, 1 owner for 36 years, 51,000 original miles, phone" I hopped on a plane to LA and to Hollywood Hills the next day.

Had it checked out by a mechanic and seemed original so became the proud owner. LA businessman Ed Wallach jnr. was rather sad to let it go since all 5 of his children wanted it but he did not want a family feud so sold her. We shifted back to NZ in January 1992 and the 140 followed in May in a reefer. We are thrilled with our Jag and enjoy riding with the breeze, view, deep throat sound as you rev into 3rd gear and the fun that comes with a Jag.

The 140 was made in 1955, it's red with 62,000 miles now and drives well. Gearbox and steering are stiff. Matching numbers, so it met our criteria. It still has its original leather gaiters on the rear leaf springs. A few jobs have been done like a new fuel tank made by talented Bill Lanes (perfect fit first time) and a new soft top by Ian Handley. In the US it is called an XK140MC. C is the C Head and M is for modified. This means that it had twin exhaust, fog lights, wire wheels and windscreen washers. Ed liked the car clean so he had removed the fog lights, heater, radio, windscreen wipers (never drove in the rain he said) and the soft top. So our 140 is "clean" except for the wipers which MOT like to see, and fog lights which I've added (courtesy of West Marshall) In the UK this version would be called an SE car – Special Equipment. We have had a lot of fun outings in her. Tony Johnson.

John Sharplin's history of owning an XK140 in New Zealand is fairly typical. He reports that his car was dispatched to California on 16th of November 1955 as a left hand drive car. It came to N.Z. in December 1960 with 35,000 miles on the clock. It was converted to right hand drive and registered to Ray Williams in December 1961. Paul Tavan purchased the car with 100,907 miles under its belt in 1973. John Sharplin bought it in 1980 at 109,429 miles. It had a bare metal restoration in the early 1980s. It raced at Pukekohe in 1988 and in 1989 and was 1st in class. It also competed at Wigram at Wings and Wheels and for two years at War Birds over Wanaka. The car was said to still purring a couple of years ago.

There is a 1955 XK140 advertised for sale in an English Jaguar publication. It has had a 17 year restoration and is said to be better than when it was new. The price is NZ \$230,000. These cars are certainly growing in value.

The last XK140 was made in 1957 and all told they were in production for 29 months.



All up 8956 were made, the majority ending up in America. In a recent Auction in Scottsdale Arizona, USA, a so called 1956 Jaguar XK140 "Aerodyne" was sold for \$280,000. Why do Americans love cutting up nice cars to make ugly ones.

Neville