

Jaguar Saloon Cars

A monthly series - Part 2

By Tony Johnson

SS1 Saloon (1931-1936)

The SS1 first appeared in 1931 and was the first car fully created by William Lyons in his bid to enter the world of car manufacturing.

Powered by a Standard engine the original 2 litre car was stylish but lacked performance to match its good looks.

The Series 2 version of the SS1 was fitted with a 2.5 litre engine which performed considerably better.



The original design for the first SS1 showed a much lower roof line but when manufacture commenced Lyons' partner Walmsley, during Lyons absence whilst in hospital, decided the roof needed to be raised to allow better access to the cabin.

The result was a less imposing vehicle much to the annoyance of its designer.

Launched in the midst of the Great Depression when many motor manufacturers were closing operations, Lyons released the SS1 which offered luxury appointments of wood veneers and leather upholstery at an affordable price.

The original SS1 cars were fitted with cycle guards and featured leatherette roof covering and an externally mounted rear luggage compartment.

Less attractive features were the limited glass areas and the rather cramped cabin.

The later Series 2 cars were much better proportioned and the 4-light saloon which appeared in 1934 was a further improvement of the design and provided the occupants of the rear seat with the opportunity to see out of the cabin.

With each styling change, the SS1 became more balanced becoming the forerunners to the styling evolution that was to take the motor industry by storm with the release of the SS Jaguar.

SS1 4-Seater Tourer (1933-1936)

The tourer released in 1933 was clearly more focussed on comfort than overall performance. These cars, as with the saloons, were well appointed and offered open air motoring without the sacrifice of any of the luxury appointments that SS cars were renowned for.



This was highlighted when Sydney Light and Charles Needham won the Concours de Confort in the 1934 Monte Carlo Rally, a feat repeated by another entrant the following year.

The windscreen of the tourer folded flat over the scuttle leaving the twin cowls exposed in a true sporting style and the hood folded neatly away behind the rear seat.

A special cover was provided to keep the roof assembly neatly stowed when folded flat. SS1 tourers were to be regular entrants in several rallies during the early 1930s with three entrants finishing in 6th, 8th and 11th positions in the 1933 Alpine Rally.

In 1934 they were to come 3rd in the team prize, 2nd in their class and won Alpine plaques. The rally success of these standard open cars was to encourage the development of a more focussed SS sports car as there was clearly a growing market opportunity for such a car.

The open 4-seater was to continue in SS Jaguar guise until the steel bodied cars were produced when it was replaced with a drop head coupe.

SS1 Airline Saloon (1935-1936)

A third example of the SS1 range is the very stylish SS1 Airline introduced in 1935 although it was to only be offered in limited production until 1936.

History tells us that Sir William was not particularly fond of this car at the time although in its day it was a class leading fastback coupe and in many ways years ahead of its time.

The Airline portrays the classical 'art deco' streamlined bodywork so typical of this period.

The pillar-less windows were unique for the time and swept rearwards in a very stylish fashion but proved difficult to build; an issue which was to be repeated in the 1970s with the introduction of the Series 2 XJ coupe.



The Airline provided more leg room than previous SS1 cars and featured an integral rear boot space.

Twin side mounted spare wheels, relocated from the trunk, set off the long bonnet. Lyons felt the car was a flight of fashion and dropped the concept when the SS Jaguar range was released in 1936.

SS2 Jaguar (1931-1936)



Introduced in 1931 alongside the SS1, the SS2 saloon was the successor to the Austin Swallow although the Austin Swallow was to continue in production for a further year.

The SS2 was a luxury small car that followed the same unique body style of the larger SS1 saloon and was the second car designed and built by SS Cars.

As a four-cylinder car it continued William Lyons theme of a small moderately priced luxury car established with the re-bodied Austin Seven programme.

The SS2 was powered by a one litre, four-cylinder Standard 9 engine and remained in production for several years until 1936.

Very few of the original cars exist today and so have become very rare.

The later SS2 saloons were more modern in style and featured flowing mudguards rather than the separate cycle guards of the first SS1 and SS2 cars

SS Jaguar 2.5 Litre (Coach Built) (1936-1938)

Replacing the SS1 and SS2 range of cars was an entirely new car known as the SS Jaguar. These new cars were powered by a new 2.5 litre engine with a Weslake designed head featuring overhead valves.

These new saloons were considerably more powerful than previous SS cars and the beautiful design now offered performance to match.



This car was to elevate SS, and later Jaguar Cars, into the luxury saloon car segment in which Jaguar was to become an ongoing market leader.

The first SS Jaguars were built on the traditional coach-built basis of alloy panels fitted to an ash frame however the cost of continuing to manufacturer cars by this method was going to prevent any large scale economic mass production, so a shift to all steel body manufacture was introduced in 1938.

This change resulted in minor alterations to the bodywork the most obvious being an extended interior with redesigned front doors and larger rear doors to allow improved access, the repositioning of the door handles in line with the chrome strip below the door windows and the windscreen being slightly altered in design. The early cars can be distinguished by the side mounted spare wheel fitted in to the left front mudguard.

SS Jaguar/2.5 Litre/3.5 Litre (Mark 4) (1938-1948)

From 1938, the SS Jaguar was made entirely of steel which allowed a greater volume of cars to be built.

The car was in fact sold as the Jaguar 1.5, 2.5 and 3.5 litre saloons but these cars were soon to be referred to retrospectively as the “Mark 4” after the introduction in 1949 of the Mark 5 Jaguar range.

The Mark 4 was in effect a continuation of the pre-war range; manufacture of which had been halted by hostilities.

The SS title was discontinued and the Jaguar name adopted after the brutal and evil reputation of Hitler's elite force during the Second World War.

Whilst appearing almost the same as the earlier coach-built version, the new all steel 2.5

litre saloon was larger than the model it replaced.

The range was extended to include a more powerful 3.5 litre version as well.



2.5 Litre/3.5 Litre Drop Head Coupe (Mark 4) (1946-1948)

The drop head coupe which continued in the post war era was a carryover of the pre-war SS Jaguar drop head coupe and was built from traditional coach-built methods unlike the saloon which from 1938 was made of an all steel construction. The expensive build structure limited production in both the pre-war SS series and the later 'Mark 4' to less than 1200 drop head coupes in either 2.5 or 3.5 litre form. Regarded by



many as the classic Jaguar of all time, the Mark 4 drop head coupe has wonderful sweeping body lines partially carried over in the Mark 5 series. The two doors were longer than the front doors of the saloon to allow entry into the rear passenger compartment and the mohair roof which followed the contours of the saloon folded neatly above the boot lid behind the rear seat. The complex nature of the folding roof necessitated substantial metal framing and roof irons which when locked into place stretched the fabric to form the contoured roof. In so doing however, considerable blind spots were created, and the rear seat was very claustrophobic when the roof was in the raised position. The roof section could also be positioned in a sedanca position with the rear section raised but the section above the driver rolled back.

More next month..... *Tony*