

JAGUAR RACING CARS

A MONTHLY SERIES - Part 11

By Neville Barlow

XJRs & Group 44

Nearly 40 years ago two sports car racing team owners beat separate paths to the door of Jaguars Chairman John Egan. The efforts that followed with two types of racing Jaguars in different areas of the world, in the 1980s, laid the foundation for the British marques return to racing at the 24 Hours race at Le Mans. The desire to win at Le Mans, more than 25 years after their last victory was indeed very strong.

As we have read in the E Types history, Bob Tullius, was greatly enamored of the Jaguar V12 engine and he was instrumental in kicking off a campaign in America in the early 1980s.

However, in 1982 in the UK, Tom Walkinshaw was very involved with his European Touring cars and it was he who would also at a later date take a leading role in the XJR sports cars. Bob Tullius was the first to introduce the idea of building a sleek new racer to comply with regulations just announced in America by the International Motor Sports Association (IMSA).

At a press conference on 6th January 1982, Graham Whitehead, head of Jaguar INC, USA said "The current IMSA program was a tailor made series for a new Jaguar designed sports car to enhance the Jaguar brand. This car is a new ground effects Jaguar V12 powered coupe designed by Les Dykstra. It will be campaigned by Group 44 in 1982 with Bob Tullius driving and Jaguar Inc. the principal sponsor.



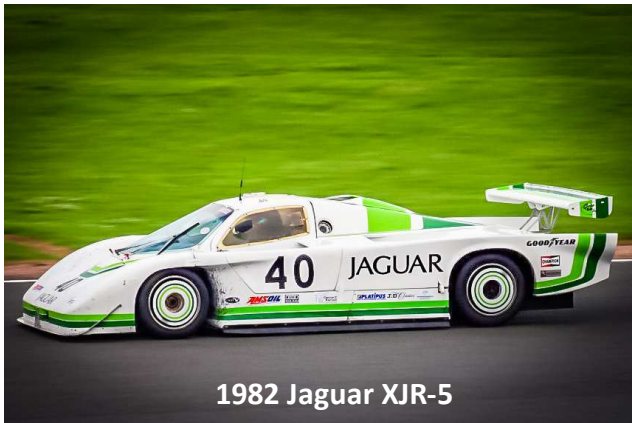
Jaguar XJR-5 Engine

Our 1981 Jaguar sales have exceeded 1980 figures by 55%. We have always been happy to have Jaguars to sell and to have John Egan, Jaguar's CEO backing us up. The goal of the program is to demonstrate the quality of Jaguar engineering and to provide the company with a powerful marketing tool".

For Bob Tullius the Jaguar car was a 'dream come true'. The first outing for the car was at Sebring. Bob said it would be a severe test as Sebring was a car killer. If we win there we will have a great chance of winning anywhere. We expect a top speed of 230 to 240mph.

The car was powered by the same 525bhp V12 engine that Group 44 used in their XJS 5.3 litre car with 6 Webber carburetors. The body was semi monocoque and fiberglass and had an aluminium chassis. In preparation for the build a quarter sized model was wind tunnel tested. The race car was only 41 inches high and had a ground clearance of 3 inches. A testing program was started in July 1982. It began with testing at Watkins Glen and pleased everyone concerned. The cars name had now been designated as XJR-5.

At a time when sports cars tended to be singularly ugly and poorly finished, the Dykstra car was beautifully made and turned out immaculately in white and green colours. Tullius was indeed a marketing man, well known for his independence and treating his sponsors very well. This was a distinctive car. It did not look like any Jaguar before it. How could it with an engine in the middle? The project had the blessing and money from Jaguar but it was an American effort.



The first race eventually was at the Road America 500 mile event. Bob Tullius came from the fourth row of the grid after a copy book start to run in fifth place. It ran consistently, made its pit stops on time, each taking less than a minute. Bill Adams took over after 28 laps and the XJR-5 finished

third, winning the GTP class. The head of engineering at Coventry, Jim Randle with Bob Knight and John Egan all witnessed the race. The next race was not so happy as Bob Tullius hit a sand bank in practice badly damaging the car.

The last two races of the year were dogged by bad luck. At the first a wheel bearing failed and the next tyre problems occurred. At the end of the year Jaguars profile was so raised that more than 10,000 Jaguar saloons were sold in America, not bad when 3 years before the brand looked doomed.

The dream was to take the car to Le Mans but 1983 really was their first crack at IMSA and with only one car it was thought they were too optimistic.

Anyway 1983 initial races were disappointing. At the 24 hour race at Daytona Tullius hit a barrier and was out. A new 300 mile race at Miami was the cars season first finish. However the race was stopped 50 miles from the end due to torrential rain. March saw the XJR-5 at the Sebring 12 hour race. The car now had more power and more torque. It qualified second. Tullius ran at the head of the field but over heating delayed the car and eventually meant they had to retire. They now knew they could compete with all and sundry but Le Mans this year was gone.

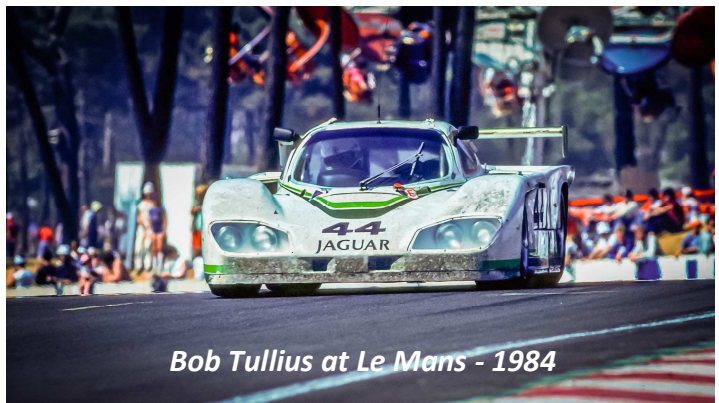
Round four was the 500Km at Road Atlanta. With 5 of the 124 laps to go a car swerved into and damaged the XJR-5, but Tullius nursed it to its first victory. At Riversdale Bill Adams skidded on oil and could not restart after running fourth and then Tullius at Laguna Seca finished second. Round seven at Charlotte, Tullius and Adams had the race in their pocket but various incidents meant they had to pit three times but he still finished third. A fortnight later they achieved their second win at Lime Rock but at Mid - Ohio, Tullius failed to finish.

On Tuesday 28th 1983 the XJR-5 arrived in Britain to have Derek Bell run some test runs at Silverstone. Attending was John Egan, Jim Randle and Tom Walkinshaw. Everyone seemed to be very impressed.

I have been unable to establish the reason for the visit but can

only suspect that it was to solidify Group 44s financial support from Jaguar. However, the fact that Tom Walkinshaw attended, was greatly detrimental to Group 44s future.

When the car returned to America Bob was concerned for the future. In the first race back the XJR-5 made the fastest qualifying lap but retired with a blown head gasket. The same problem affected the car in the next race but the chief engineer Fuushee rectified the problem by doing away with the gasket entirely!



The next race at Mosport was a huge win. A fourth win at Pocono meant the Jaguar finished second in their class for the season and Bob Tullius was second in the Driver's Championship.

The 1984 started well with Group 44 now running two cars. At Atlanta, Tullius was third but at Miami it was a first and second for the XJR-5 with Tullius breaking the lap record. The rest of the season could only bring minor places for the XJR-5, so they finished the in third place.

1984 was the year Bob Tullius decided it was time to contest the 'holy of holies' the 24 hours of Le Mans. He was encouraged by the cars reliability and knew baring unusual accidents he could have a real chance. This meant campaigning in opposite sides of the world and as he found out it had a detrimental effect on his success at home.

It was important to fly the Jaguar flag in France and he was indeed encouraged by Jaguar. Two XJR5's were dispatched in June 1984. Both cars qualified well up the order and in the race Tullius briefly lead the race, perhaps because his car had been lightly fueled at the start. Both Jaguars ran in the top six before encountering gearbox failure and retiring. In 1985 again two XJR5's took part. A CV joint failed on one car and it was retired but the other Group 44 car driven by Bob Tullius and shared by Robinson and Ballot-Cena, limped home in 13th place with one of its 12 cylinders blocked off after a piston failure. To finish was a victory of sorts.

John Egan said that he realised as early as 1984 that Tullius wasn't going to be able to win at Le Mans. "His was a brave effort and got us over the first hurdle (finishing) but it did not bring the degree of engineering expertise that I thought TWR and Tom Walkinshaw could".

After agreeing to the deal to enter IMSA back in 1982 Egan had told Tullius two things. The first was he would take Jaguar back to Le Mans and the second that one day the Jaguar factory would take over the program. Bob saw the writing on the wall saying "I guess it is a home team that gets to be the race team". TWR became the home team even though Group 44 had shown some promise, it unfortunately had failed to win any Championship.



Neville