

JAGUAR RACING CARS

A MONTHLY SERIES - Part 15

By Neville Barlow

XKR Rocketsports Trans-Am

In the early 2000's, the Jaguar XKR was the car that many Sports car racing teams preferred to use.

In America the Trans-Am competition was the most favoured for this Jaguar. Rocketsports Racing which has been racing since 1978, with great success, re-introduced Jaguar to the Trans-Am competition in 2000. Headed by the owner Paul Gentilozzi, Rocketsports saw the possibilities of successfully racing the Jaguar XKR, especially after the victories that they had witnessed achieved by Bob Tullius with his XJS. "The Trans-Am is the perfect fit for Jaguar in the North American market" said George Ayres, Vice President of Marketing in North America. "It is the largest running North American road race series- a series that continues to see a growing number of Jaguar XKR cars competing. The marque is delighted to be returning to road racing where it has enjoyed great success in the past. Work has already started on developing the racing Jaguar V8 at Rocketsports workshops at Lansing in Michigan"

The engine was based on the on the all- aluminium 4.2 litre engine. The AJ-V8 that powered the XKR was supercharged. Rocketsports engineers plan to increase the V8's capacity to 4.5 litres and more than double the horsepower from the standard 294 BHP to over 650 BHP.

The alloy cylinder block and cylinder heads will be retained but a heavy-duty crankshaft will be fitted along with lightweight pistons and con-rods. There will be a fuel injection system installed which will allow the engine to rev to 9,000 RPM. The carbon fibre and Kevlar bodied car will be able to reach an impressive 0 to 60 MPH in 3.2 seconds.

In 2002 drivers, Scott Pruett, Paul Gentilozzi, Brian Simo and Micheal Lauer, drove an XKR to a class win in the 24 Hours at Daytona for the Rocketsports team. It is interesting to note that Scott Pruett, a decade earlier, won the same race in a Jaguar XJR-12 for the British team of Tom Walkinshaw.



Jaguar Transam Rocketsport XKR

Four XKR's were prepared and a roster of top sports car drivers, were employed, headed by Paul Gentilozzi. To say the Jaguars were dominant in the Trans-Am competition was a huge under- statement. They won the Manufacturing Championship in 2001, 2003, 2004, 2005, and 2006. The victories included three for Gentilozzi and one each for Klaus Graf and Scott Pruett. These very fast XKR's lead over 70% of the laps and finished on the podium 17 times including four 1-2-3 finishes.

In an article written by Brian Harper for the magazine 'Driving' he said "Victory is the name of the latest edition of Jaguar's graceful XK. The name by Jaguars reckoning celebrates a significant moment in XK history- Jaguars fifth Manufacturers Championship in the Trans-Am racing series.

In 2005 Rocketsports owner and champion driver Paul Gentilozzi said "We set out as one of our goals this year to win our fifth Championship. With the help of Klaus's ability and Scott's determination and my competitive spirit, Jaguar has another championship to promote their brand and sell more cars including the 2006 Victory XK car, commemorating their Trans-Am Championship.



Jaguar XKR-GT2 - Paul Gentilozzi

They won again in 2006. The Trans-Am was discontinued in 2007 but was back in 2009. Rocketsports continued to dominate by taking out one more Championship with the XKR driven by Tomy Drissi.

As a foot note, Paul Gentilozzi, always a Jaguar man, took a 5.0 litre V8 Jaguar XFR to the Bonneville salt-flats, to see just how fast it could go. With minor aerodynamic modifications, changes for safety, a re-mapped ECU and a revised supercharger it broke the Jaguar XJ220 record of being the fastest ever Jaguar car. The XJ220's record was 349.4 KM/H while the XFR reached 363.188 KM/H. This speed is faster than the New Zealand land speed record held by a Lamborghini and it used high octane aviation fuel!

Paul said "During my career, I have raced worldwide, from the southern tip of New Zealand to Le Mans.

Along the way I have been privileged to drive and own many exciting motor cars but I have never driven one that was as exciting as this XF Jaguar"



Jaguar X Type Racer

In November 2002 Rocketsports unveiled a concept Jaguar X Type that they said was a 'project car' for the enthusiast market as well as continuing to explore options for Jaguar racing in North America. It was based on the Jaguar X Type all-wheel drive with the 3.0 litre AJ-V6 engine.

Modifications were made to the body for aerodynamic improvements as well as bigger wheels and Brembo 14 inch brakes. This was an aggressive looking vehicle. I believe Rocketsports felt that this vehicle might start a whole new class for racing saloons up to 3.0 litres but it seems that idea failed and this was the only one ever so modified.

XKR Racing in Britain.

In 2007 Apex Motorsport developed a Jaguar XKR for use in the FIA GT3 European Championship. Apex had previously teamed with Bentley to win the 2003 GT class 24

hours at Le Mans. The XKR featured a 4.2 litre V8 supercharged engine producing nearly 500 BHP and retained the aluminium body of its production cousin Rocketsports Racing who had developed a similar car for Le Mans.

A chance meeting, as the Apex involvement with Audi and Bentley was winding down, brought team leader Richard Lloyd and Jaguar designer Ian Callum together and sparked a new racing venture between Apex Motorsports and Jaguar.



Jaguar Apex

A plane crash took the lives of David Leslie, who was to drive for Apex and team owner Richard Lloyd. They were on their way to test the car in France before the 2008 FIA GT3 season began. Despite the loss the team carried on contesting the 2008 season with Phil Quaye as the primary driver. The best finish was a 3rd at Spa.

This was the only season that they competed at and the team was disbanded soon after. One is left to ponder the possibilities if the tragic air crash had not occurred.

The XKR Swiss team

In 2014 the Swiss Emil Frey Racing team campaigned in a Jaguar XKR GT in the Blancpain series in Europe. Frey was the very first distributor for Jaguar and even had a relationship going back as far as 1926 with William Lyons.

This car raced at the 24 hours at Le Mans in 2014 but unfortunately retired at the 14 hour mark due to gearbox failure. They continued to develop the car and had a strong run to finish 9th at Nurburgring in the 1000KMS.

A great start to 2015 saw a podium finish at Silverstone. This car was powered by Jaguars 5.0 litre V8 which produced over 500BHP with a Ricardo six-speed gearbox. The aluminium bodied Jaguar also had a light aluminium chassis. The team finished the 2015 season 5th in class which included a win in their class at Nurburgring again.



Jaguar Swiss Emil Frey GT3 Racer

In 2016 Frey Racing, for the first time ran two cars in the GT3 class at the Spa 24 hours. The car piloted by Markus Palitalia was in first place overall by lap 66. Unfortunately a collision with a back marker meant an hour spent repairing the car and that ruined their whole day.

They were back again at Spa in 2017 with two cars for the 24 hour race. Despite a strong qualifying performance one car was out with suspension problems on lap 69 and the sister car retired with mechanical problems a few hours later. You would think they would by now have given up!

The 2018 season was to be Emil Frey Jaguar Racing team's final year. A regular contender at the Spa 24 hours they finished and were 4th in class.

The team's farewell tour with XKR was indeed a stellar year. The team placed 4th overall at Barcelona and 1st in the Silver class.

At Monza, they were 5th overall, and 1st in class. They were crowned the 2018 Silver class Cup Endurance Driver's Champions and 3rd overall in the European Endurance Cup team rankings. All's well that ends well!

Invictus Games

The Invictus Games is an International adaptive sport created by Prince Harry, the Duke of Sussex. It had the backing of Boris Johnston when he was Lord Mayor of London, the Organising Committee of the Olympic and Paralympics and the Ministry of Defence.

It was created for wounded, injured and sick armed services personal. The first games took place in 2014. Lewis Hamilton, a seven times Formula One World Champion was appointed as the first Ambassador.

With interest such as this and the backing of Jaguar Land Rover a new GT 4 Jaguar car was entered in the British GT Championship.



Jaguar Invictus F Type

It was named Invictus Racing and financed by James Holder. Despite conforming to standard GT regulations, the Jaguar F Type SVR GT 4 was run only in the British GT Championship. This car was produced by the Jaguar-Land Rover's SVO division and only two cars were made.

The first season was in 2018 and the cars raced in the Pro-Am series. Mathew George and Jason Wolfe were the full time professional drivers however there were some amateur drivers as well. In the second season only one car was run.

The team ran in 15 races, retired in 9 but unfortunately failed to obtain a podium place. The main objective was involving as many of the service men in the preparation of the cars and this really seemed to change many of their lives.

The Invictus team disbanded prior to the 2020 season. In February 2020 the two cars with spares were sold for \$NZ 437,000. It would be a pity if they were to go to a museum, so I hope we may, some- day soon, see them out on the race track again.

Neville