

The Amazing Jaguar XK120

By Neville Barlow

Jaguar XK 120 1948 To 1954

The first XK 120 was introduced at the 1948 London Motor Show at Earls Court. It was the recipient of William Lyons new 6-cylinder, twin overhead camshaft engine. That was to take the world by storm. However, the engine was intended for the upcoming Jaguar Mark 7 but that car was not yet ready for production. So, a hastily put together small sports car called the XK 120 had the privilege of showing off this engine. The car was named the XK 120 because it was considered that it would be able to reach a top speed of 120 mph. Many pundits laughed at such a prospect of this unheard speed.

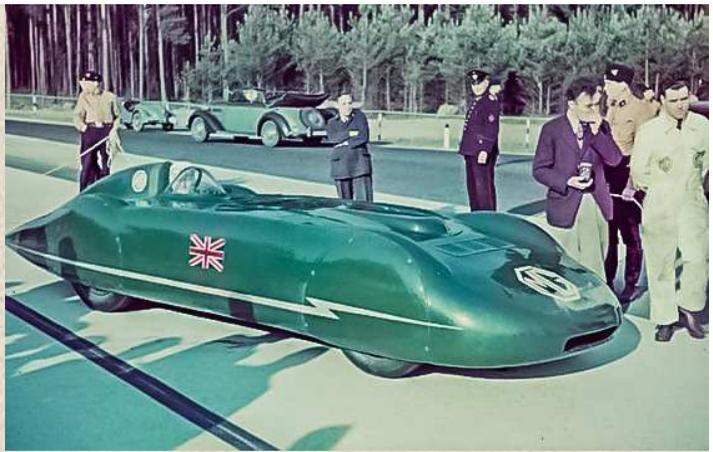


In May 1949 Jaguar's Test driver Ron 'Soapy' Sutton took the very second made XK 120 to the Belgium racetrack at Jabbeke and achieved an average of two runs of 132.596 mph (213.393 kph). Afterwards he surprised those people officiating at the speed test by driving past them at 10 mph in top gear! The Observers Book of Automobiles said it was the fastest production car in the World. These speeds recorded over 70 years ago were sensational for those days when most cars could only reach 60 mph.

The Jaguar 4 Cylinder Engine

The idea of a small 4-cylinder 1996cc Jaguar engine did remain alive for several years and a number of XK 120s were built with this engine but were tucked away, so none reached production. This 4-cylinder did make one major contribution to Jaguar's performance history. Arrangements were made with well-known Land Speed Record driver 'Goldie Gardner' to install one of these engines in his Streamliner which normally took an MG engine. The Jaguar engine produced 146 Bhp and was able to run in the under 2 Litre class. Goldie was able to push his extremely light bodied car to 2-way average speed of 176.696 mph and thus claim another World Land Speed Record.

This success was loudly promoted by Jaguar at the Earls Court Motor Show some weeks later. The 4-cylinder was looked at for some time but a 2-litre motor was more economic to be produced by de-stroking their 6-cylinder engine that was making all the news.



Jaguar XK 120 Roadster JWK 651

In early 1950 Stirling Moss and Leslie Johnston drove around the little track at Montlhery for 24 hours non-stop, travelling 2579.16 miles averaging 107.46 mph (172.94kph). This was the first time a production car had averaged over 100 mph for 24 hours.

In 1951 Leslie Johnston drove solo in JWK at Montlhery again, for One Hour achieving 131.83 miles (212.159 kph). This sowed the seed for another record attempt but this time for one whole week.

Jaguar XK 120 Coupe LWK 707

In August 1952 Stirling Moss, Leslie Johnston, Jack Fairman and Herbert Handley drove a stock standard XK 120 around the same track at Montlhery, near Paris, for 7 days and 7 nights non-stop, including stops for tyres and fuel, at an average speed of just over 100 mph (162 kph).



Each driver took a 3-hour stint and as Stirling said, "It became very boring". The night driving especially on the steep banking was a neryv process. Each lap took only 42 seconds. In the rain and the fog, they kept going and they each had their different ways of keeping awake because falling off the steep banking would be a trifle inconvenient, if not fatal!

The drivers all played tricks on each other, especially at night. One dreary night Stirling noticed a group of mechanics playing cards on a table, on the edge of the track. He thought that the table was moving closer each lap, and then, he was SURE! He eventually was close enough to blow the cards off the table. Another time he wondered if he was hallucinating when he saw a Witch, complete with broom stick disappear over the top of the track. He did notice a lap board table suddenly appear at the side of the track. Was it to count down the laps but no it was moving further and further on to the track until there was only a 6 foot gap for him to roar through at 125 mph.

It felt like a Marathon that would never end. But at the end after a full week of driving they broke 4 International Speed records, covering 16,851 miles at an average of just over 100 mph (162kph).

The blackboard at Montlhery read; FOR SALE- JAGUAR SALOON- CAREFULLY RUN IN.

Jaguar XK 120 no MDU 524

Also Known as XK 120 Jabbeke or C/D or Coventry Disco or XK 120 C

This car made only two early semi-public appearances. One was at the Belgium Jabbeke Motorway in 1953 when Norman Dewis, Jaguar's Test driver drove it. The other was when it was used as a comparison between the C Type and the D type. Jaguar MDU was a factory works competition XK 120 Roadster. It was first used as a factory entry in the 1952 Alpine Rally where it won the unlimited class and placed 2nd behind Jaguar XK 120 known as NUB 120. IT was returned to the factory for the fitting of a streamlined body, a bubble top and modified mechanics for an attempt at the Flying Mile Record in April 1953 achieving an average speed of 140.789 mph. A V8 Pegaso beat this record some moths later so Jaguar went back on 24th October and produced the World breaking record of 172.412 mph. A brass plaque was fitted to every production XK 120 thereafter. This car is the only Jaguar to have set a World Land Speed Record.

Because it was overshadowed by the D Type it was forgotten and was thought by many people to have been broken, as that was what happened to many experimental Jaguar cars at that time. However, it has recently undergone an 18- month exhaustive, front to back restoration by JD Classics a UK business specializing in Jaguars. So MDU 524 lives to run another day!





Jaguar XK 120 in Rallying

Ernest Ian Appleyard received factory support from Jaguar in 1948 and entered his first Alpine Cup. Despite stopping to help an injured rival, he met all the target times and was awarded his first Coupe des Alpes (Alpine Cup). At the wheel of his XK 120 (NUB 120) and with his wife Patricia "Pat" Lyons, the daughter of Jaguar founder Sir William Lyons, as his co-driver, the Appleyards finished the Alpine Rally unpenalized three times in a row from 1950 to 1952, becoming the first driver to win the concerted Coupe d'Or (Gold CUP). Only two drivers would match this feat: Stirling Moss in 1954 and Jean Vinatier in 1971.

Appleyard went on to take his fifth Coupe des Alpes in 1953. In the Netherlands he drove to victory in the Tulip Rally in 1951 and in his home country won the RAC Rally in 1951 and 1953. He was runner up in the Monte Carlo Rally also in 1953. For a year or two he raced sporadically but did take a second place in the 1956 RAC Rally in an XK 140.

In his gleaming white Jaguar XK 120 he became a sporting legend for his generation.

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