

# The Rise and Fall of the British Motor Car legend, Sir William Lyons and the iconic Jaguar Cars. - Part 3

By Geoffrey O'Connell (Continued from Part 2 - April magazine)

A new method of assembling the framework of the cars was introduced but could not be made to work so the manufacture of completed vehicles was at risk of coming to a halt. Holland who had been refused an allowance for the move to Coventry had elected to stay put in Blackpool. Lyons realized that to overcome the assembly difficulties he would have to persuade Holland to make the move, one of his incentives being to considerably increase his salary! Holland agreed to come back to work at Swallows and immediately reworked the framework assembly system and in so doing greatly increased the weekly car production.

On the 29<sup>th</sup> of September 1929 Lyons and Walmsley purchased their Block number three and an empty fourth Block at a cost of £18,000.00 for which a mortgage was arranged with the Coventry Permanent Building Society.



**Standard 9**



**Fiat 509A**

Holland's arrival encouraged an expansion of the Swallow bodied vehicles which included chassis from the Fiat 509A, the Standard Nine, the Swift P-Type, and post January 1931, the Wolseley Hornet. Holland was to stay employed by Swallow until after WW2 was over. During 1930 it became apparent that sales of the Austin Seven Swallow were slowing

down but from its inception through to 1932, when the Austin Seven Swallow ceased being produced, some 3,500 were manufactured. Furthermore, the supplies of other car manufacturers chassis were being diminished. As a for instance, those of the Fiat 509A were no longer available as the manufacture of that model had ceased and the Swift Motor Company was about to cease trading. Thus, it was time to create a new model.



**Wolseley Hornet**



**Swift P-Type**

## Standard Motor Company



*Exterior view of the Standard Motor Company's factory in Coventry taken about 1922.*

In that pursuit John Paul Black, the General Manager of Standard Motor Company Ltd., and Alfred George Beech Owen of Rubery Owen & Co., were extremely helpful.

During 1930 Lyons and Holland developed a wooden pattern of the proposed vehicle's new chassis to be made by Rubery Owen that would be necessary for the proposed SS 1. Black was to take the frames from Rubery Owen and supply a rolling chassis fitted with the Standard Motor 16hp (actually 15hp) engine (straight 6, side valve, 2054cc) for the SS 1 at a cost of £130.00.



**Rubery Owen & Co**

## Swallow SS1



The rolling chassis for SS 2 was a lowered chassis of the Standard Little Nine saloon fitted with the 9hp engine (straight 4, side valve, 1006cc) at a cost of £82.00.



To carry out that alteration to the Standard Nine chassis Black requested a payment of £500.00 to assist in the cost of the equipment necessary to alter the chassis frame. The construction of the SS 1 prototype caused some problems as during its preparation Lyons had to undergo the removal of his infected appendix. On his return from the hospital he was appalled to find that in his absence Walmsley had taken it upon himself to alter several matters of the project. The major alteration was to raise the roofline to make easier access to the car and improve the driver's



Swallow SS2

visibility. Despite Lyons initial reaction, he was to admit his partner's decision was correct,



more especially as the 1931 London Motor Show, being held at Olympia between the 15<sup>th</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> of October, was only a month or so away. At that event Swallow was given a stand in the Coachbuilders unit, not the main hall where the traditional motor car manufacturers were on display. They were to exhibit a carnation red and black painted, four-seater fixed head coupe SS 1 with a banner declaring that it cost £310.00 complete, an SS 2 four-seater fixed head coupe priced at £210.00, a Wolseley Hornet Swallow and an Austin Seven

Swallow. Prior to that later event The Autocar magazine of the 31<sup>st</sup> of July proclaimed that *'Swallow were to produce a new model known as the SS. The car is a marvellously low-built two-seater coupe of most modern line. Aft of the long bonnet is a very smart two-door body and at the back of the body is fitted a big luggage box'*. Immediately prior to the Motor Show, the Daily Express newspaper of the 9<sup>th</sup> of October, in an article by Harold James Pemberton, stated that *'the SS 1 the car with the £1000.00 look. The new motor car is certainly the lowest-built British car I have ever seen. Two short people can shake hands over the top, and there is ample room within. It is so low that footboards have been done away with. When the sliding roof is open a short man can look down on the seats. The steering wheel comes below the level of the windscreen so that vision is almost perfect. The car I saw was green externally and the dashboard was of green wood beautifully engrained. The SS will certainly be one of the most novel cars on view at Olympia'*. As a matter of interest SS was derived from 'Standard Swallow' but Lyons years later was of the opinion that it originated from the 'Swallow Special'.

The Company's name was changed to the Swallow Coach Building Company.

The SS 1 and SS 2 were manufactured from 1932 through to the end of 1935, whilst sales continued into 1936. During that period a number of design, engineering and style changes took place. That which follows in respect of the two models is my understanding of the alterations and when they took place. I repeat – my understanding!

In 1933 SS 1 was available with a tourer body and SS 2 could have a saloon body and a 1343cc or 1608cc capacity engine unit. In 1934 the SS 1 was available with a saloon body and 2143cc or 2663cc engine capacities whilst SS 2 could have a saloon or tourer body and engine capacities of 1343cc or 1608cc. Also, in that year a synchromesh gearbox became standard which saved having to double declutch in order to change the gears. In 1935 SS 1 was available with an Airline saloon body and SS 2 was only available with a four-seater saloon body. During their period of manufacture some 4,200 SS 1's were made and 1,800 SS 2's.

During all the above, in 1933 Holbrook Bodies Ltd., who occupied the adjacent two building blocks to Swallow, closed down. When the premises came up for sale Lyons made an offer of £8,000.00 which was accepted. Some sources advise that the price was £12,000.00 as the purchase included the Holbrook Bodies sawmill.

In 1934 S.S. Cars was formed and purchased the business of Swallow Coachbuilding Co., which latter entity was then liquidated, and the Swallow Coachbuilding Company (1935) Ltd., was formed which continued to make sidecars. In 1945 Swallow Coachbuilding Company (1935) Ltd., was purchased by the Helliwell Group, Walsall Airport, who manufactured aircraft components. At the first AGM of SS Cars, on the 28<sup>th</sup> of November 1934, William Walmsley resigned from the Company and Lyons purchased his shares thus taking sole control of SS Cars.

It is worth noting that from September 1935 S.S. Cars were designated SS Jaguar.

*Geoffrey*

*Continued as Part 4 in June magazine*

