

The Jaguar XJ220

By Neville Barlow

This car was born out of controversy. The fact that it never saw the light of day is more than remarkable. When Jaguar was finally set free of Leyland Motors and put into John Egan's hands, with the charge of "make Jaguar great again" or if that is not possible, close it down. Innovation without the financial support was to be the road which was necessary. As far back as 1984 Jim Randle, Jaguars Design Chief, gathered around him a group of engineers who met in their spare time, mainly on Saturdays and called themselves the Saturday Club.

Keith Helfet styled the nearly 17-foot-long vehicle. It was intended to remain a one-off prototype but several things happened. In 1988 the car was first sighted by John Egan and he decided it should be displayed at the Birmingham Motor show to show what Jaguar could produce. To say it was enthusiastically received was to put it mildly. The fact that Tom Walkinshaw had won the Le Mans 24-hour race that year with his XJR V 12 engined race cars also boosted Jaguars profile.



In 1990 Jaguar Sport was created which was a company half owned by Tom Walkinshaw and half by Jaguar. It was decided to produce a series of 350 XJ 220's utilizing the race winning V 12 engine. It is said that over 1,500 deposits were accepted for this supercar. With an aluminium body and 550 BHP, the car was said to have a top speed of over 200MPH (340KPH) and 0-60 MPH in 3.3 seconds.



Classification for Le Mans cars had changed and Tom Walkinshaw was now producing a 3.5 Litre V 6 supercharged engine.

Although he had accepted a reduced number of orders for the XJ 220 almost all his customers said they wanted the V 12 engine.

So, they cancelled their orders. The crazy thing was the new engine produced 680BHP and because the engine was lighter the car was even faster. Many cars were unsold for years.

However, Tom was undaunted. In 1993 he took nine of the original XJ 220s, converted three to XJ220C racing cars and the other six to XJ 220S specifications. The three XJ 220Cs raced at Le Mans in the Gt Class and one was victorious. The cup was presented, the winning money handed over and the trophy engraved. Six months later the French authorities decided that the English car had broken some hidden rule and changed the official winner to a Porsche. Very strange that the trophy was not asked to be returned,

Nor was the prize money requested back.



The six XJ 220S's were converted to road machines but Tom took the chance to considerably alter them to make them even lighter and faster.

He stripped the cars of their aluminium body work, leaving only the door skins in place and replaced it with carbon fibre.

Added was an adjustable rear wing and a new front splitter.

This resulted in 400Kg being removed from the

kerb weight producing a total weight of just 1080Kgs. In one car, TWR installed a titanium exhaust system and recalibrated the engine to over 700BHP.

These six XJ 220S's cars are banned from the road in America and can only be found in Motor museums.

Neville