

The “Ambience” and “Aromatic” composition of Jaguar interiors of the 1950s and 1960s that make them— quintessentially Jaguar.

By Andy Bryant

1. Connolly “Vauvol” leather.

Connolly used a vegetable - or organic tanning method, (Rather than a pure chemical, chrome - tanned leather, which used a mixture of chemicals, such as salts, acids and dyes). Vegetable-tanned leather is processed using natural (Organic) materials including rhubarb roots, olive leaves, and chippings from Oak and Spruce trees. Other materials are then added, including “A cocktail of extracts from Mimosa bark, Quebracho wood and Myrobalan - an Indian nut - plus extracts from Sumac bushes - from East Asia and America (From Connolly’s own brochure). This was an expensive tanning process, but gave Jaguar’s leather interiors that very special “Aroma” and it gave the leather seats a softer touch, extra scent, and the seats would remain soft and supple throughout the life of the car. (Provided they were kept well fed, say, with Saddle soap etc.)

When the cars were brand new, that smell of soft new leather, combined with Wilton carpets, and gleaming and highly polished walnut veneers - was very very alluring - especially to teenage, car mad boys like myself.

2. Carpets.

Jaguar used high quality Wilton style carpets from the 1940s - with a thick pile thread count and an 80/20 Wool/Nylon mix. This was used in combination with a Jute underfelt, with a sprayed Bitumen layer on the underside for extra sound deadening. Being a natural material, Jute has an earthy smell, and in combination with the adhesives used, formed a significant part of the background odour of Jaguars classic interiors of that era.

3. Wool Headlining.

West of England cloth was used - until the late 1960s. Available in Beige, Grey or Green, this was a 100% wool cloth with an open weave and a sparse nap.

On my Mk VIII, it was hung from hoops from the roof above, which had the underside coated in a Bitumen mix with underfelt attached to it - presumably as a sound deadening material, (But also as an insulating material from heat and the cold.)

4. Walnut Veneers.

My 1958 Mk VIII, manual, O/D - in Cornish Grey over Dove Grey was dispatched from the factory on 27th Nov. 1958 - after the Mk IX had been introduced at the October Earls Court motor show. But like the Mk IX - it was advertised at the time, as the most luxurious Jaguar ever produced! And I still believe that!

It featured dark Circassian Burr-walnut veneers, perfectly mirrored from the centre line of each panel.

The factory sanded and polished these veneers over three weeks to achieve the deep gloss finish. In the 1950s and 1960s, the veneers were sealed with multiple layers of cellulose lacquer and polished using Simonize furniture polish with Carnauba wax from the leaves of the Copernicia Prunifera - a Brazilian palm tree, with quite a distinctive aroma to it.

All this added to the “As new” smell!

(Note - from the 1970s - a polyurethane lacquer was used - sprayed on in multiple layers.)

References: Jaguar World”, pages 62-66, September 2023 and own cars and reading.

Andy