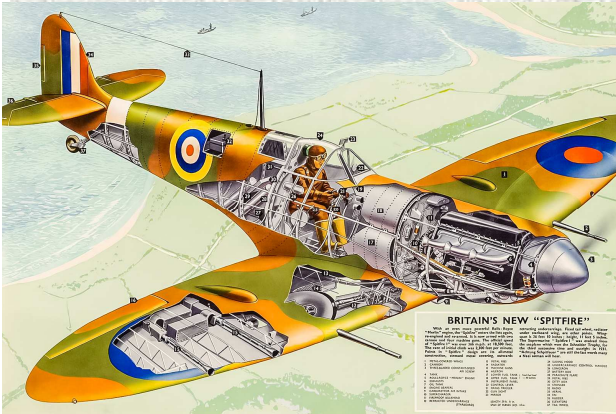


Jaguar XK120 - Part 1

By Neville Barlow

Of the multitude of cars manufactured by Jaguar in the last 100 years, I have to say that for me the XK 120 first produced in 1948, is the standout car for me. I admit I am biased because when I sat in one at the age of seven I was hooked on Jaguar cars.

I believe the XK 120 was the most successful sports car of all time.

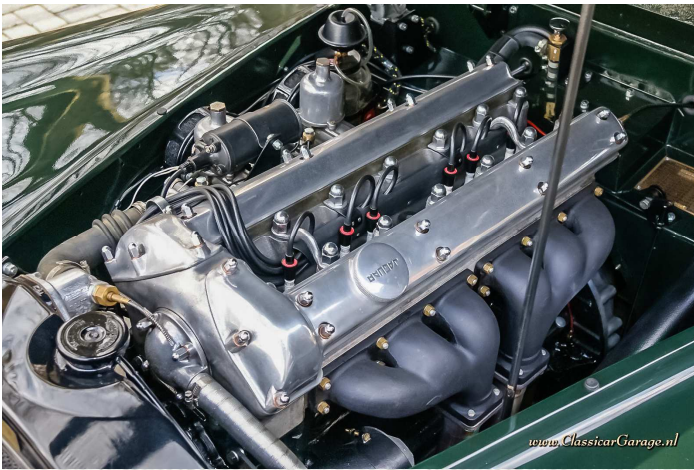


In World War 2, like many other vehicle manufactures, Jaguar switched to the Manufacture and repair of military projects. This included components for aircraft such as the Spitfire, Lancaster bombers (especially the rear gunner's area), the Mosquito and Oxford. They also experimented with 4 - wheel drive buggies and by 1944 had produced 30,052 light

weight trailers some of which were amphibious when fully loaded.

William Lyons and his engineers, Walter Hassaan, Claude Baily and Harry Westlake were all employed as their part of the home defence as Fire watchers to protect the Jaguar buildings from the German Luftwaffe bombers as they tried to bring Britian to its knees. In 1943 William Lyons was sure that Germany would soon be defeated and with the diminishing number of German planes attacking, he decided he would like to produce a new and very powerful engine for future Jaguar cars to keep ahead of any future opposition.

He wanted a prestige engine that would look good both on paper and in the metal, that sounded right and had great power. It had to have an overhead camshaft and to produce at least 120 BHP. The initial pilot study under war time conditions was hardly ideal but the team was extremely enthusiastic.



They started with a small 1300cc, four-cylinder engine, with the code name XF. Test runs with a 2 litre 4 - cylinder engine was followed by a 3 litre 6-cylinder engine. Eliminating noise and vibrations with these engines was hard to counter.

Because it was thought that success in the American market would depend on a more torque engine, a 6-cylinder engine was increased to 3.4 litres.

This engine solved many problems and became renowned for its great balance and smooth delivery of power. I remember my father demonstrating this when with the engine running in his Jaguar Mark 8 he slowly removed the spark plug wires one by one until only one spark plug was operating, yet the engine could still be revved up and down.

In the 1950's there were not many Jaguars around and we found that when ever Dad parked his Jaguar Mark 7, it would gather a crowd and always there was a request to open the bonnet. It was then that they saw the wonderful straight six twin cam engine with those highly polished camshaft covers.

So, I guess William Lyons got his desire for people to "look at the engine" as well as it having great power. William Lyons knew that if they made no mistakes with this engine, it should easily outperform everything else on the market by a wide margin, irrespective of price. The original engine was used in the very first XK 120 in 1948 and produced 160 BHP.

During the difficult period after World War II, Jaguar Cars intended to produce as their first car since 1938, the Mark VII, a four door car which would offer a new standard of luxury, refinement, style, performance and be their first 100mph saloon. While the XK straight 6 Twin Camshaft engine was available there was many problems with the Mark VII's build and there was a severe shortage of steel for its body.

William Lyons had with the 1948 London Motor Show looming large, only six weeks to find an answer. It was decided that a small sports car would fill the bill and so the XK 120 was born. The radical lines, potential performance and bargain price was the sensation of the show. It was intended to produce perhaps one hundred XK 120's but because the first day orders were over two hundred, he knew he was on a winner.

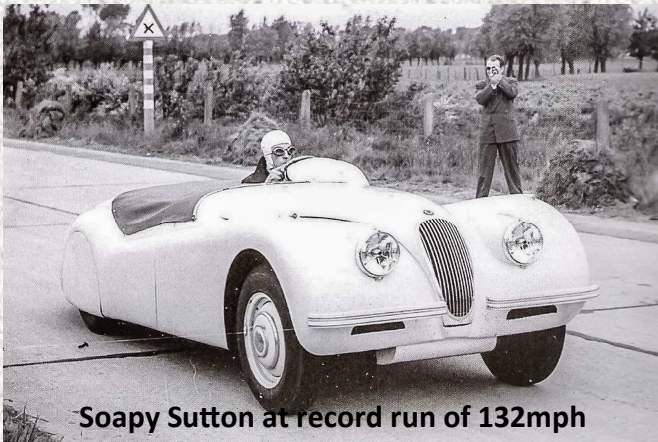
The first 242 production XK 120's were hand-built with aluminium bodies on ash framing, were constructed between late 1948 and early 1950. To meet demand, and beginning with the 1950 model year, all subsequent XK 120's were mass-produced with pressed steel bodies. Aluminium doors, bonnet and boot lids were retained. The XK 120's steel chassis was mostly copied from the Jaguar Mark V, using many of the same parts.

Racing and Rallying.

1949

There is some evidence that William Lyons was somewhat annoyed when some motoring Journalist scoffed when they were told that the XK's 120 name was also the top speed it could record. In May 1949, with a standard car using standard fuel, on a standard road at Jabbeke in Belgium, test driver "Soapy Sutton" managed 173.4 Km/h (132.6mph), and to the amazement of the press, he pattered back down the track at 10mph in top gear.

The first race victory: In the daily Express-sponsored One-Hour Production Car Race held on 30th August 1949 at Silverstone Circuit, England, Leslie Johnston drove the Jabbeke car to the XK 120's first ever race victory ((despite an early collision with a spinning Jowett Javelin which dropped the Jaguar to fifth). Two other XK 120's took part. One driven by Peter Walker, finished second and the other driven by Prince Bira, who spun out of



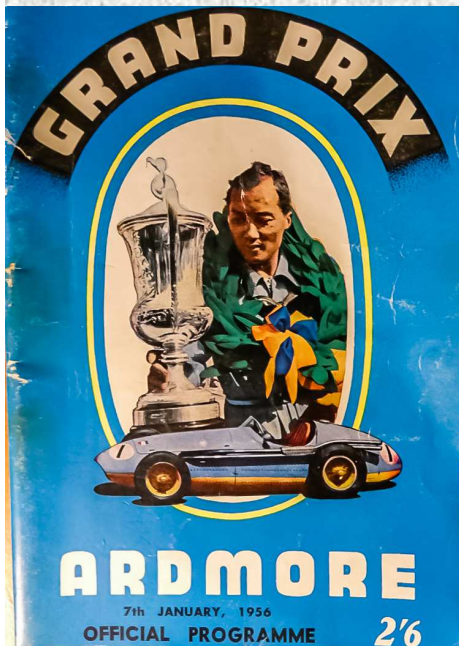
Soapy Sutton at record run of 132mph

contention when a tyre punctured. (some of us older gentlemen will remember Prince Bira winning the second NZ Grand Prix in 1955 in his Maserati)

1950

First victory in America: In January Johnson also scored the model's first competition success in America, winning the production class in a race at Palm Beach, Florida, with the car that finished second at Silverstone. In May, XK 120's driven by Phil Hill finished first and Don Parkinson in another XK 120 finished second at the inaugural Pebble Beach Road Races. I notice that a Nascar race was won by Al Keller held at Linden Airport, New Jersey, USA. Foreign cars were banned from this series and that I guess is why the XK's had on more victories!

It appears that in America the majority of the XK 120's landed there were snapped up by well known film stars, who flocked to buy the 120, to see who would be first to have their photograph taken sitting at the wheel.



Prince Bira - Winner.

They included Clark Gable, Humphrey Bogart, Dick Powell, Elizabeth Taylor and Errol Flynn, plus many others. The fastest saloon car in the World at that time an obvious draw card.

Several XK 120's ran in the famous 2,000- mile 7-day Carrea Panamerica Race in Mexico, and while not winning showed they were virtually unbreakable.



Clarke Gable with his XK120

Le Mans: Three extensively modified cars were entered. One car had to retire in the 21st hour while in third place. The other two finished 12th and 15th both with problems but they finished. The results convinced William Lyons and Chief Engineer William Heynes that another shot at Le Mans was worth investing in the future.

Silverstone Production Car Race: Five XK 120's entered the race, which Peter Walker won, with Tony Rolt second and Johnson recovered from spinning on oil to finish eight. Jaguar won the team race.

Tourist Trophy: XK 120's achieved a 1-2-3 victory in the TT, held at Dundrod in heavy rain. On the eve of his 21st Birthday Stirling Moss drove Tom Wisdom's car to a brilliant win ahead of Whitehead and Johnson, and once again Jaguar won the team prize.



Stirling Moss winning his first race in an XK120

Alpine Rally: Ian Appleyard's XK 120, road registered as NUB 120 won the Alpine Rally with his wife Pat, who was the daughter of Sir William Lyons, navigating. They also won the coveted Coupe des Alpes.

In early 1950 Stirling Moss and Leslie Johnstone, drove Jaguar XK 120 JWK 651, around the little track at Montlhery for 24 Hours non-stop, travelling 2579.16 miles, averaging 107.46mph (172.94kph).

This was the first time a production car had averaged over 100mph for 24 hours.

Neville