

Jaguar XK 180 Prototype

By Neville Barlow

The Jaguar XK 180 is a concept car created by Jaguar Cars to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the XK car and to show the world the skills of Jaguar stylists, craftsmen and engineers. It was presented at the 1998 Paris Motor Show.



Jaguar became the talk of the town after revealing a stunning roadster prototype – the XK 180. The car was developed over a 10-month period as a one- off design study and to also commemorate the 50th anniversary of the XK engine that debuted with the XK 120, way back in 1948. It was also to advertise the newly formed Special Vehicles Operation (SVO) department.

Responsible for the exterior design was Keith Helfet- who is credited with the XJ220 Supercar as well as the XJ41 concept- working under the supervision of the late Geoff Lawson (1944-1999), Jaguar’s Design Director.

This car has a 4.0 litre supercharged V8 engine with four valves per cylinder, developing 450 bhp (336 Kw) and 44 lb-ft (603 N-m) of torque. It has a five speed Mercedes automatic transmission gearbox with control buttons on the steering wheel. Claimed speed is 180 mph (290 km/h) and it could accelerate from 0-100 km/h (62 mph) in 4.5 seconds. Two XK 180s were built in total, one in RHD and the one in LHD was sent to the USA. Both were roadsters.

Billed as ‘An exercise in accelerated development’ there were multiple purposes behind the concept. It was to be a statement piece by Jaguar, to showcase yet again what they could in terms of bespoke development. Their last example, the Daimler Corsica, was by now over two years old.



It acted as a shop window, although never intended for production, it showcased various components being incorporated into the design of future models including up graded brakes and wheels.

Thanks to the incredible cooperation of the Belgian authorities, the 50th anniversary in 1999, was celebrated at the famous Jabbeke motorway which was where the second made XK 120 broke all records in 1949 and defied the motoring journalist by reaching 132.6 mph.



The XK 180 was included in the fast runs on this famous parchment with Jaguar Heritages C and D types as well as an XJ13, an XJ220 and an XK 120.

The car featured in both straight- line performance and on a handling circuit created out of straw bales, that really showed off the car's handling ability.

After the Jabbeke event the car served at various press and promotional occasion and at Jaguar dealers' events. By 2005 Jaguar had moved on and the car became a museum exhibit and has since then become a static piece.

There has been a number of replica XK 180s and back in around 2002 I was lucky enough to see one of these at an Auckland Jaguar Club car show. It turned out that this was owned by a man called Warwick Hickling who now lives in the Gisborne area and was one of our earliest Jaguar Drivers BOP members.

Neville