



JAGUAR



Official name: Jaguar Land Rover Automotive LTD

Owned by: Tata Motors.

Formerly owned by: British Motor Holdings, British Leyland Motor Corporation, Austin Rover Group, then Ford Motor Co.

Owns: Jaguar Cars, Land Rover, plus subsidiaries in India and China.

Current situation: Ford lost billions on Jaguar, but Ford money and expertise raised Jaguar from a basket case to a company with a fighting chance of survival. Jaguar is not making money, while Land Rover is very profitable. This allows Jaguar's owner to announce high profits for the Jaguar Land Rover group as a whole, while concealing the fact that Jaguar is still an economic liability.

Chances of survival: uncertain.

Jaguar is a luxury carmaker at a time of economic upturn. Jaguar's new owner is clearly relying on a growth in Third World wealth to provide new customers, but that seems a high risk strategy, given the harsh fact that economic booms are almost inevitably followed by economic busts. If Tata loses on its Jaguar purchase, Jaguar may be sold once more, perhaps to the Chinese •



A brief commentary on Jaguar



Jaguars, like Alfa Romeos, are a rich man's toy and a poor man's downfall. Traditionally, Jaguars offered effortless luxury, speed and style to those who could afford it.

Most cars today are designed by teams of anonymous engineers and stylists: the Jaguar car company was the brainchild of just one man: Sir William Lyons (below).



Lyons was a genius who could elegantly combine engineering, style and luxury into one attractively priced package.



Founded as the *Swallow Sidecar Company* in 1922, Lyons and his partner originally made motorcycle sidecars. Sidecars required flowing metalwork. Flowing metalwork meant the sidecar moved through the air quicker, but also looked far more elegant.



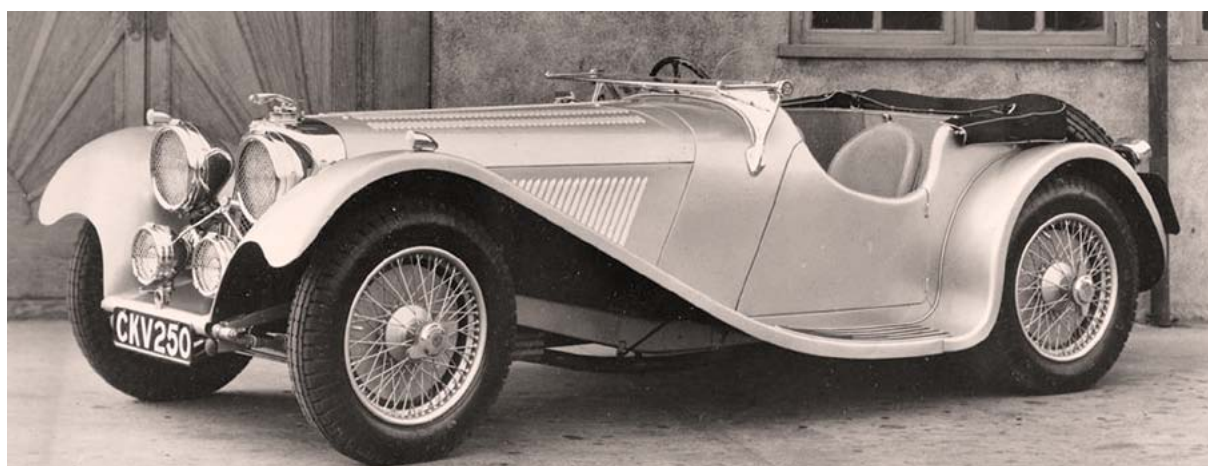
In an age when most cars were boxy and clumsily styled, it was an easy step from producing stylish sidecars to producing stylish bodywork for existing models.



The name *Swallow Sidecar* didn't suit cars and was soon abbreviated to simply *SS*. With a bit of practice, Lyons became expert at building cars; *SS* models soon became synonymous with power, handling and style.



One of the most popular *SS* models was the *SS Jaguar* (the *Jaguar* below has the leaping jaguar mascot up front, but this wasn't fitted to most cars).



During World War II, the *SS* car company built and repaired airplanes for the military. But Lyons was also quietly planning for the new world that would follow the end of hostilities.



The post-war world was starved of cars, especially stylish and powerful ones.

The initials SS were quietly dropped, because they were linked in the public mind with Nazi atrocities. Thus, the SS car company became the Jaguar car company.

For the first few years, Jaguar had to survive by rehashing old-fashioned pre-war models.



However, within a few years, Jaguar was back in full production. The 1948 XK120 (below) combined power, looks and handling. Jaguar couldn't build enough of them to meet the demand.



Lyons devoted his life to building fast and beautiful cars. Although he employed professional designers, Lyons was personally responsible for the styling of every new model.



In fine weather Lyons would play around with the styling of new models in front of his own house, with the neighbourhood children watching from the fences.



Jaguars weren't just for show. The Mk VII (above) won the Monte Carlo Rally in 1956.



Jaguars seduced the wealthy. Few other cars had the character of a Jaguar: that distinctive styling that was flowing but not showy, the high performance, the grace, the feeling of complete, luxurious comfort.



The 1959 Jaguar Mk II (above) was, truly, the best of British: beautifully built, elegantly styled, luxurious, with a healthy dose of performance and handling. By the end of the 1950s, Jaguars were *cool*.





And it got better: in 1961, the 240km/h Jaguar E-Type stunned the world. Beautifully proportioned, phallic and powerful, crowds burst into spontaneous applause when the E-Type was first shown at the Geneva Motor Show. In a single moment, every other car at the show became old fashioned; everyone wanted an E-Type.

The waiting lists for the E-Type stretched into years. It seemed like every young aristocrat, movie star and pop idol in the world had an E-Type, or wanted one.

The E-Type was a long way from perfect. Early models had a cramped cabin, tended to overheat, had a gearbox better suited to a tractor and dodgy brakes. Convertible versions leaked. No one cared.

In 1964, the E-Type was updated to deal with these issues, and the sales continued to climb.



As Lyons grew old, he feared for the future of the Jaguar company. To secure its legacy, he merged Jaguar with the giant British Motor Corporation in 1966. This was a mistake; industrial Britain was in turmoil during this time.

Alas, at this point, Jaguar joined the rest of the British car industry as it flew into an orgy of self-destruction. The stunning Jaguars of the 1950s and '60s morphed into the catastrophic Jaguars of the 1970s.



The 1968 Jaguar XJ6 was a brilliant idea that failed due to inadequate development, surly staff, antediluvian boards of directors and trade unionists who refused to accept any changes that would lower the wages or conditions of their workers.



Don't just blame the workers: the XJ6's designers got the car to the point where it would run for a while without giving too many problems, then put the vehicle into production, warts and all.

British customers put up with this level of poor quality, because they knew no better. To this day, you hear British Jaguar enthusiasts say the XJ6 "wasn't that bad."

It *was* that bad.



Here's a sadly typical story:

"I [traded my car for an] especially lovely chocolate brown 1976 Jaguar XJ6.

"My first few months of ownership were pleasurable, and by that I mean I enjoyed getting out of the car at stoplights to tap a fender in order to get the lights on that side of the car working again. I got a chuckle when the car left me stranded suddenly and inexplicably, only to find out an inertia fuel cut-off switch was exceptionally poor in design..."



“Several leaky fuel tanks later (conveniently located outboard of the frame just millimeters from the big dangerous world we live in, the one where gasoline is highly flammable) the car started having problems.

“If I drove anywhere and shut the car off it wouldn’t start again for at least a half hour, seemingly only after she caught her breath...The car would [leave] me stranded in only the most unsavory of locations, for reasons only my apparent bad Karma understood. There was a new plot twist, she would no longer continue the journey after cooling down but now required a complete rebuild of her starter motor each time she clunked out.

“This led to me not only choosing to stay much closer to home on my adventures with ‘Miss Kitty’, but also determining the route we took to get there in the event of another catastrophic breakdown.

“Once my engine blew, [but] it was a simple matter of rebuilding some bits and we were back on the road...

“The second time my engine blew, I sold the engine block to a gentleman whom I believe wanted to make a coffee table out of it.”



As the 1970s lurched into the 1980s, the British economy began to boom, but the problems within Jaguar remained terminal.

Take this classic quote from Australian motoring writer Tony Bosworth, writing during the late 1990s in *Sports & Classic Cars*:



“Just over 10 years ago a bright, gleaming Jaguar XJS V12 was delivered to my door. The mission: road test the car. I looked at it for a long time. That purposeful shape, that long, sweeping bonnet, that stunning V12 engine. I imagined the silky smooth power, the effortless power steering, the comfortable black leather seats. I imagined what it would all feel like. Unfortunately that was about all I could do: the day after it was delivered, the Jaguar broke down. Just stopped and wouldn’t go again. It was eventually winched aboard a trailer and disappeared back to Jaguar; I never saw it again.”



Ford bought Jaguar in 1990; Ford money and expertise raised Jaguar from a basket case to a company with a fighting chance of survival.

Under Ford, Jaguar quality improved from abysmal to merely poor. However, Ford made the mistake of trying to cash in on Jaguar's prestige by filling Jaguar cars with Ford parts and actually selling a Ford Mondeo (below, left) as a Jaguar X-type (below, right).



This stupidity damaged Jaguar still further: it was bad enough that Jaguars were unreliable, but at least they were unique luxury cars when they were working. Ford cheapened the Jaguar brand and alienated even the remaining customers.

Jaguar gained an unlikely saviour in the form of Indian industrial conglomerate *Tata*. Tata bought both Jaguar and Land Rover as a way of gaining profitable market share in developing countries such as India, Brazil and China.



On the surface, this has worked. Record sales of Jaguar Land Rover products around the world have made the company profitable, but the profits hide an ugly truth: Jaguar still isn't making money; Land Rover is paying the bills.



Under Tata, Jaguar has produced several slick new models (below), but they look very much like every other luxury sports model out there: Jaguar has lost its unique identity. And Jaguars are still unreliable.



Only time will tell whether Jaguar will survive. If Tata can't make a go of it, some other car-maker will probably buy the rights to use the Jaguar badge on its own mass-produced models •

