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GREAT CARS

JAGUAR XK

A celebration of Jaguar's 1950s classic

NIGEL THORLEY

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Contents

Introduction

Books on Jaguar are legendary and every year there is something new to read. However, certain Jaguar models deserve more than their fair share of publications, as those cars have become icons of their time. Not only have such cars become important historically but they are still very much 'in the frame' today as representative of the best of British and, in the case of the XK, introduced the world to one of the most famous engine units of all time, carrying the same name.

This publication, like the other *Great Cars* titles is laid out chronologically to cover the history of the XK sports car from 1948 through to the end of production in 1961. The XK story reflects the success of Jaguar, its renowned straight-six engine, and the postwar growth in popularity of the British sports car at home and abroad. So this narrative looks not just at the XK itself but also the surrounding forces that it affected and that affected it, from the competition with other makes to the state of the economy at the time.

To begin to understand the advances and risks the company took in the development of the XK engine and XK sports cars, we need to start by looking at the underlying conditions during this period in the British motor industry.

The forerunner of Jaguar Cars Ltd was SS Cars Ltd and its first attempt at a sports car was the SS90 in 1935. Rakishly styled, it owed its mechanicals to the Standard-based SSI saloon with side valve engine and production was limited to a mere 23 examples, most of which were used by their owners in competition.

The major work, however, was to put into production an entirely new luxury saloon. Although still based on Standard mechanicals, eminent engine designer Harry Weslake converted the engine to an overhead valve arrangement, boosting the performance. This unit would be unique to SS Cars, if at the time still built on its behalf by the Standard Motor Co.

This new car was the SS Jaguar 2½-litre saloon, the Jaguar name a mere model designation, the brand still being SS. Alongside this fabulous and

very reasonably priced 90mph saloon came the SS100 sports car built around the same chassis and engine, initially in 2½-litre and later in 3½-litre form as well. With a top speed of nearly 100mph and 0–60mph acceleration in under 13sec, the SS100 was an outstanding performer by any standards and at prices of £395 and £445 represented incredible value for money. Unfortunately a mere 309 SS100s were produced pre-war and the model was not reintroduced postwar.

At this point the company was not a major exporter of cars; indeed its best export year ever was 1939 when a mere 252 cars went abroad out of a total of 5,378 produced. This would have repercussions after the Second World War.

The Jaguar XK range (from left to right): early XK120 aluminium-bodied Roadster, late model XK150 fixed-head coupé, and XK140 drophead coupé. (Courtesy Tom Wood)

There haven't actually been many Jaguar sports cars produced. The much later XJ-S and XK8 models are more akin to grand tourers than sports cars in the true sense of the word. That leaves the E-type, to many the ultimate Jaguar *and* British sports car. In many ways that is true but it is a car of its time and therefore not a very fair comparison to the earlier XKs. Also, whatever the attributes of the E-type, its origins still lie in the XK!

When announced in 1948, the Jaguar XK120 was entirely new: a showcase for the new six-cylinder engine, with the underpinnings of a new chassis, independent front suspension, and an all-enveloping aerodynamic body. It was a car that took the motoring world by storm and no one, least of all Jaguar, realised the acclaim the XK120 would receive.

Compared to contemporary sports cars the XK120 left them standing (literally!) and even when put alongside its new saloon brother, the Mark V, which used essentially the same chassis and suspension, the XK looked positively futuristic. The irony of the early XK story is that the model was no more than a last-minute attempt to generate greater interest in Jaguar and its stand at the British Motor Show, rather than a serious new production model.

The XK120 became the ‘must have’ car for those who could afford it or could get their hands on one. Motoring personalities and film stars were all desperate to own one. This fuelled the ongoing success of the model both at home and abroad. The XK became a major money-earner bringing much needed cash back into a war-torn Britain and, of course, improved the ‘street cred’ of the then still relatively unknown Jaguar brand.

The very first sports car concept from SS, the 90, was essentially a rebodied SSI and still retained the Standard side-valve engine. (Courtesy Jaguar Cars Ltd)

The Weslake-engineered overhead valve 3½-litre straight-six engine that powered all pre-war SS Jaguars and postwar saloons until the introduction of the XK and later Mark VII model. (Courtesy Jaguar Cars Ltd)

The Jaguar SS100: the first real sports car produced by the company and carrying the Jaguar name. A mere 309 were produced. (Courtesy Author)

The Jaguar XK120 is truly a car that inspired the motor industry, so much so that over the next decade a host of other British sports cars appeared on the scene from mainstream manufacturers such as MG, Triumph, Austin-Healey, Sunbeam, and even Daimler, as well as many smaller producers including AC, Aston Martin, and Lotus.

It wasn’t until 1950 that full production of the XK120 got under way at the time when Jaguar also introduced its flagship saloon, the new Mark VII – the car for which the XK engine, its chassis and suspension were really intended. Although the Mark VII was ultimately more successful, it was the XK120 that really stole the limelight for some considerable time.

The next stage of development for the XK was entry into competition, much of which was brought about by F. R. W. ‘Lofty’ England, Jaguar’s service manager at the time. This fuelled the reputation of the Jaguar sports car, which was upgraded eventually to meet the changing requirements of

the buying public and the need for more refinement and performance. This led to the XK140 in 1954, the XK150 in 1957, and, of course, the racing side of the story with the Le Mans-winning C-types and D-types of the 1950s.

The XK story is fascinating: it was thefirst car to introduce the XK engine, the first volume-produced Jaguar sports car, and the car that formed the basis of Jaguar's racing success.

Acknowledgements

I was very pleased to be given the opportunity to write this, my third *Great Cars* book, on the XK sports cars. Particularly I thank Mark Hughes for his faith in my ability and to Steve Rendle who helped put the package together. Also to Tom Wood for his superb studio photography that brings the XK to life in this two-dimensional format.

My sincere thanks to those owners of the superb cars represented in this book. They willingly supplied their cars for the extensive and time-consuming photo-shoot and their cars represent the very best of the XKs around today. As custodians of XKs, it is a tribute to the work they have carried out or had done on their behalf to maintain such cars in pristine condition.

The Jaguar Daimler Heritage Trust provided the ex-Ian Appleyard XK120 (NUB120), the black two-seater (OOF748) and the ex-Montlhéry record-breaking car (LWK707). The Jaguar Enthusiasts' Club loaned its Prize Draw XK150 fixed-head coupé for 2008 and David Hall his lovely XK140 drophead coupé. Long-time XK owner and enthusiast Mick Duffy provided his superbly presented XK150 'S' Roadster and XK150 drophead coupé and Peter Twyford his recently restored XK120 drophead coupé. Finally, courtesy of Derek Watson Jaguar Specialist, the XK140 fixed-head coupé belonging to Nick Sutherland-Dodd and the pretty blue XK140 Roadster belonging to Trevor Brown.

The Mark VII saloon, introduced in 1950, was the car for which all the XK components were really intended. (Courtesy Jaguar Cars Ltd)

Archival information is vital to authors like me to supply important detail

and data to substantiate other areas of research and I was fortunate to have access to the Jaguar Daimler Heritage Trust facility in Coventry. It is a tribute to Jaguar Cars Ltd that such paper and photographic records have been maintained for posterity to benefit future generations. Other material came from the records of *The Autocar* and *The Motor* magazines as well as my personal archive. In the same vein, I thank friend and fellow Jaguar historian Paul Skilleter for the assistance he provided. Finally, members of the Jaguar Enthusiasts' Club were most helpful; this organisation continues to support XK racing today, providing a superb spectacle for us all to enjoy.

Lastly thanks to my wife Pauline for her continued patience in putting up with me and my obsessive hobby with Jaguars and motoring in general. Without her support projects like this would certainly not be possible.

It is particularly fitting that this book was first published in 2008, the 60th anniversary of the launch of the XK120 and the XK engine, a time of much celebration and bringing together of XK enthusiasts from all over the world. To all XK owners, past and present and those aspiring to own one, enjoy reading this book as the last accolade must go to the cars themselves. The XK120, 140 and 150 represented a major move forward for Jaguar and the British sports car industry, vitally important in their day and still sought after and much admired by so many today.

Nigel Thorley

Design and development

There were no fewer than 36 British car manufacturers active at the time the Second World War commenced, all of which were turned over to war-effort production so it wasn't until September 1944 that the Board of Trade in the UK officially announced that new postwar private car development could take place. However, it was clear that some manufacturers had been busy working on new models during the war (if in some secrecy) as, for example, Armstrong Siddeley showed advanced pictures of its new Lancaster and Hurricane models during the first week of the European war ending! By September 1945, low-volume producer Lagonda was already running prototypes of its new W. O. Bentley-designed twin-overhead-camshaft engine that would later appear in a new saloon and an Aston Martin. SS Cars (soon to be renamed Jaguar Cars Ltd) had also carried out wartime private car engine development.

William Lyons, founder of the Jaguar organisation and genius behind the XK sports car. (Author's collection)

A change of emphasis

Before the Second World War there was a slightly superior view of the British sports car, built primarily for the home market audience; a mere plaything for the young and enthusiastic or those who were older but should have known better! For many reasons, therefore, most sports cars were very small with small capacity engines – more fun and noise than significant in performance terms. After the war, however, things were changing, not least because of the need to export large numbers of cars to new markets.

Relaunched in 1946 the modified pre-war saloons, now 'Jaguar' badged, enjoyed some modicum of minor improvements in specification and trim

but William Lyons realised that, to move the company forward, it was vital to introduce a new class-leading 100mph luxury saloon as soon as possible. Saloons had been the successful basis of company expansion and sales pre-war and, in view of the vast numbers sold compared with the SS100 sports car, this was where the emphasis had to lie, just as it does today. For this new saloon, a new engine would be required.

Engine design parameters

The heart of any car is its engine and without doubt this was the most important part of the new XK120 sports car: a car that took its name from the power unit under the bonnet and one that might never have seen the light of day had Jaguar not decided to 'showcase' its new engine in such a car. The Jaguar XK straight-six power unit was one of the most important engines designed and built in the UK, was unique in many ways, and remained in production far longer than the majority of other engines. It was 1992 when the last car, ironically a Daimler limousine, left the Jaguar factory with a 4.2-litre version of the XK engine. This same engine was also developed for other markets: for marine use, for fire tenders, and for the military.

It all started with a small team of SS Cars engineers: William Heynes (who joined the company in 1935 from Humber and Hillman) as chief engineer; Claude Baily (who had worked for Anzani and Morris) as Heynes's chief designer, and Walter Hassan (another very experienced engineer on cars like ERA and Bentley), who became the chief experimental engineer. The three-man team was supported and led by William Lyons himself, co-founder of the company and by this time sole managing director. Although he had no formal experience, he guided the principles of what he wanted from the first in-house designed and built engine to power new postwar models.

The story goes that they worked on the project behind the scenes, while fire-watching on Sunday evenings at the factory.

The principles for the new engine were set by Lyons and his team based on several parameters. The engine should form the basis of a series of power units offering improved performance over the norm, be so advanced as to avoid ongoing costly development changes, be cost effective to manufacture, and have looks to match its performance. Simplicity itself!

For the power output an arbitrary figure of 160bhp had been pulled out of the hat. This related to a figure higher than nearly all other production engines of the time and was related to a Hassan-modified, highly competitive SS100 with the 3½-litre pushrod engine. Driven by Tommy Wisdom pre-war, the car had achieved a top speed of over 118mph on the Brooklands circuit. As the final engine (or engines) would be produced to power a new generation of postwar luxury cars, Lyons dictated that it would have to be able to achieve 100mph in unmodified form.

This led to discussions about the size of the engine and its design. The smaller 1½-litre four-cylinder SS Jaguar saloon had been the best seller pre-war and with cost and fuel restrictions predicted postwar, it seemed logical that a four-cylinder design would be most acceptable for volume production. To extract the best performance from such an engine various principles were examined resulting, in 1943, in two designs being chosen for prototyping.

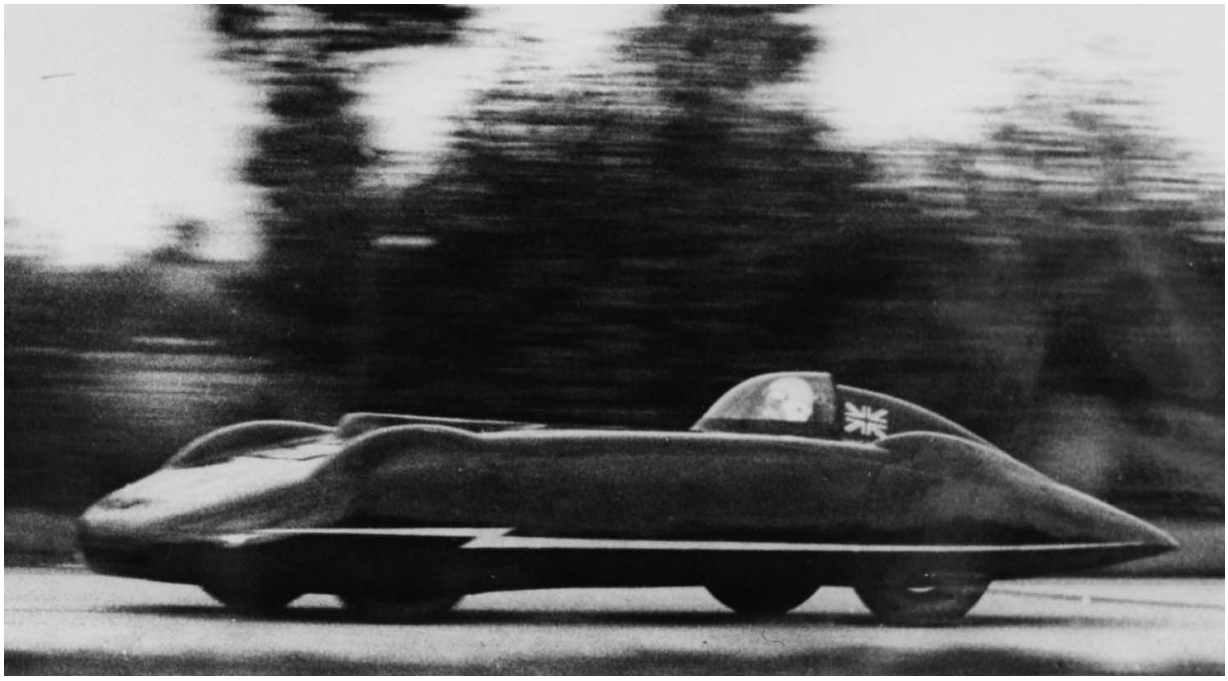
The principles of a twin-cam arrangement and opposed valves in a hemispherical combustion chamber, suitably gas-flowed by an expert like Harry Weslake (who had worked so successfully on the pushrod engines), would be ideal. Claude Baily was already familiar with single overhead cam designs but twin-cam arrangements were not so common, particularly among mass-produced engines, so the work would be somewhat groundbreaking for the company at this time.

Four-cylinder developments

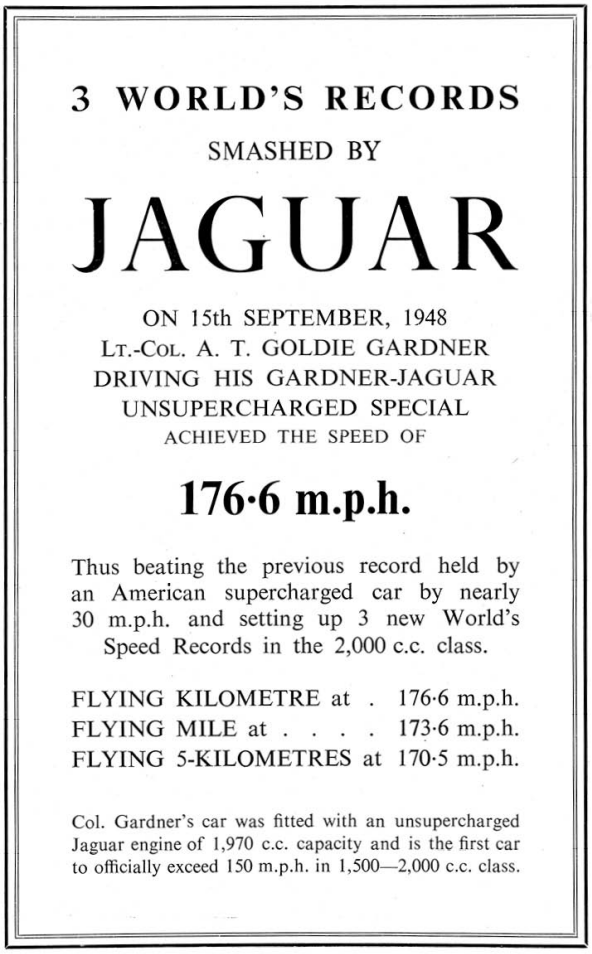
Two specific engines were prepared for evaluation. The XG was little more than a conventional 1½-litre production block modified to accept an alloy cylinder head with hemispherical combustion chambers, valves set at 45° operated by a single camshaft, tappets and modified pushrods in the nearside rocker box. This engine had a capacity of 1,776cc with a bore and stroke of 80.5mm x 98mm but on test was found to produce inferior results to a standard pushrod equivalent, although later these figures were improved.

The other engine, designated XF, a proper twin camshaft unit with ports modified by Weslake, proved superior from the start, and had many detail features that would follow through to the production engines. Initially a small capacity unit of 1,360cc, it was later increased to 1.8 litres and in

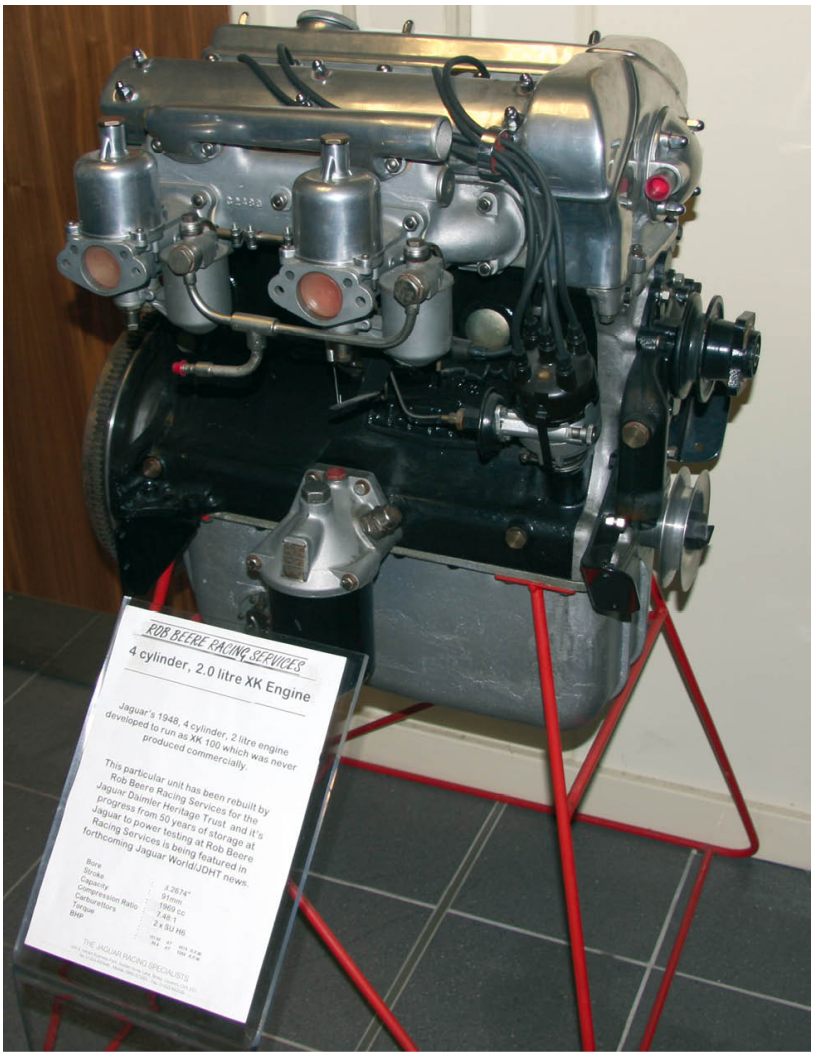
early testing achieved a modest 76bhp; later tests improved on this considerably.



Goldie Gardner with his record-breaking MG EX135 car, powered by a Jaguar engine in 1948. (Courtesy Jaguar Cars Ltd)



A celebration of Gardner's achievement with a Jaguar engine, taken from the in-house Jaguar Journal of November 1948. (Courtesy Jaguar Cars Ltd)



The final version of the four-cylinder engine that might have powered the XK100. (Courtesy Author)

Over the course of the next couple of years different versions of this engine were built and tested, culminating in an engine of 1,995cc capacity but producing what is recorded as a modest 96bhp at 5,400rpm. This is in stark contrast to a similar engine prepared for Lt Col A. T. 'Goldie' Gardner and his record-breaking MG.

Gardner had met Weslake and seen the four-cylinder Jaguar engine under development. He approached William Lyons with a view to borrowing such an engine and not only got his approval but Lyons promised him a minimum of 140bhp (which he got). Gardner's MG EX135 with this engine installed achieved a new world record for the 2.0 litre Class at 176.694mph

on 14 September 1948 on the Jabbeke highway in Belgium.

This success led to speculation that Jaguar was re-entering the sports car market and indeed William Lyons was actually quoted in *The Motor* magazine as saying: 'A perfectly standard engine as will be fitted to the new sports car which will be announced in the near future.' The truth of the matter was that this was no standard engine.

The final version of the four-cylinder unit intended for the XK100 sports car had a capacity of 1,995cc and would have been hard pushed to achieve 100mph in the car with not very encouraging acceleration times. It may have been faster than many other sports cars of the period but in real terms it would not have created the interest and demand that William Lyons expected. The build costs to produce the four-cylinder-engined car were not substantially less than a more powerful six-cylinder version, which led to a zero price differential when launched. Then there was the issue of refinement, something a four-cylinder engine would lack compared to a smooth-running six. Finally, intended to capture export sales, particularly in the US, a four-cylinder car would not havegone down well – size was everything over there!

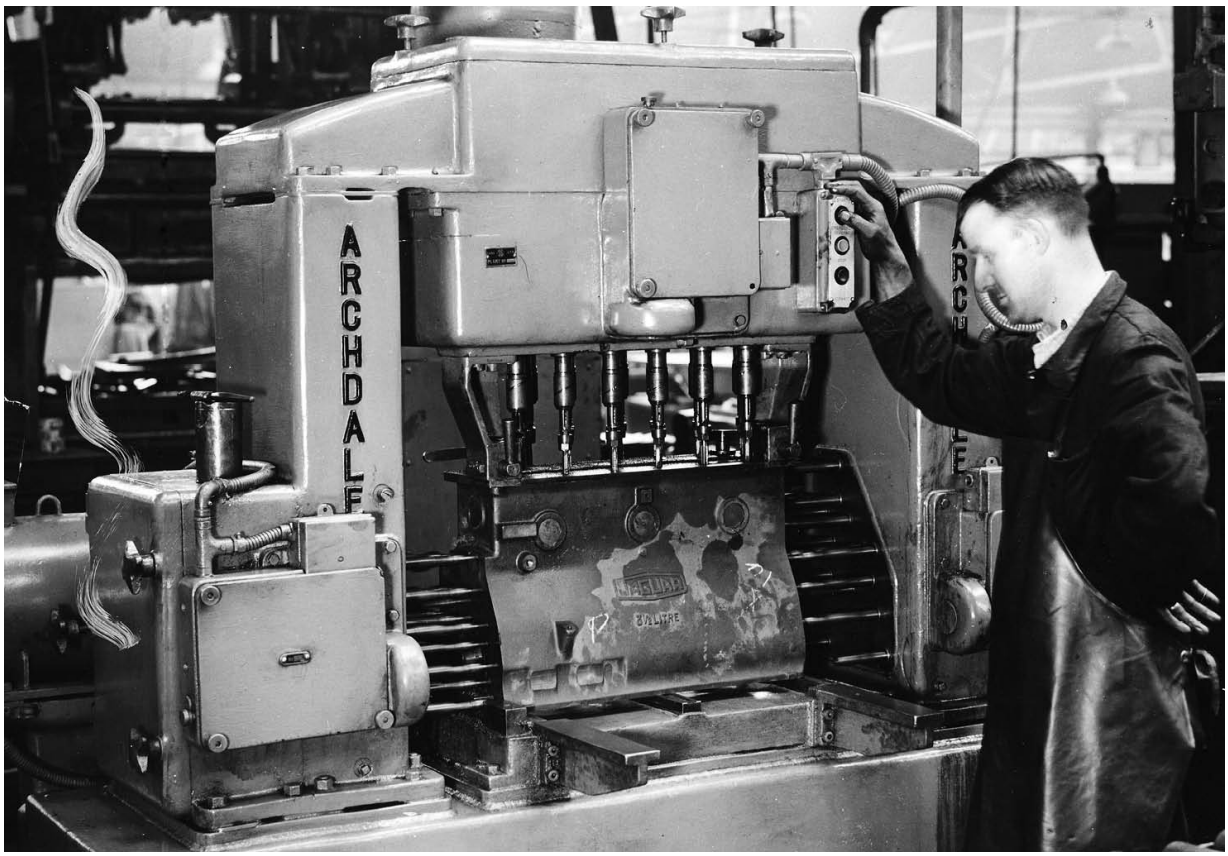
The production engine

In September 1947 came the first reports of testing the six-cylinder version of the engine, destined for the new Jaguar saloon to be launched in 1950. Bore and stroke were increased to 83mm x 98mm to create a capacity of 3,181cc but this only achieved around 147bhp at 5,000rpm, which, although acceptable, didn't create sufficient torque to match the pre-war 3½-litre pushrod engine. The stroke was lengthened to 106mm, resulting in the final production engine capacity of 3,442cc.

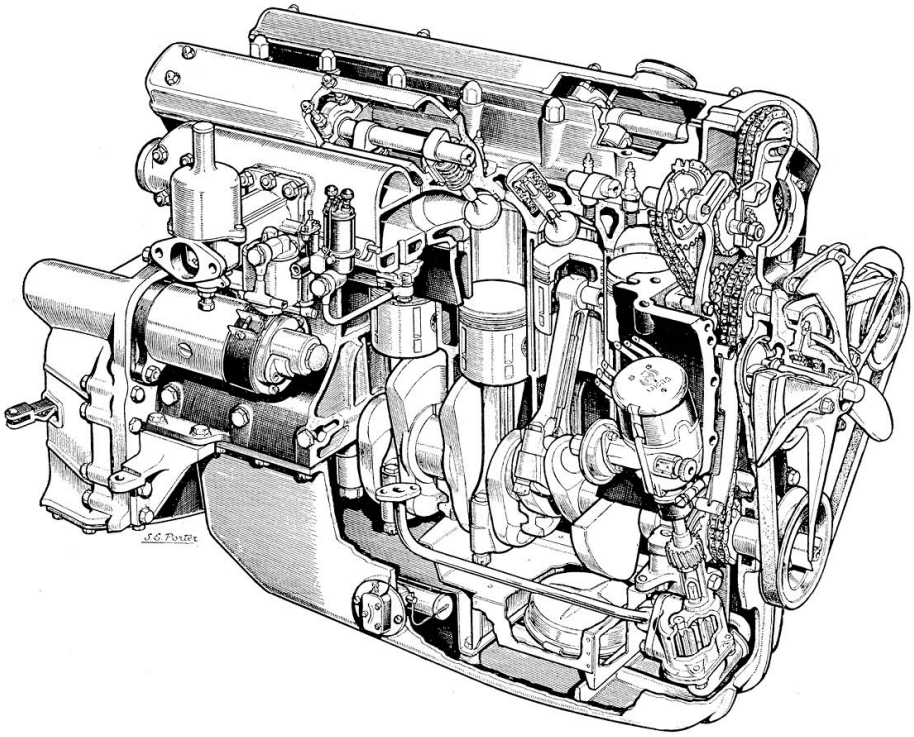
The chromed cast-iron combined cylinder block and crankcase, produced in the rough by Leyland Motors, was finally machined in-house at Jaguar. The crankshaft came from a massive forging made of EN16 manganese molybdenum with seven main bearings of 2.75in and big end journals of 2.086in of Vandervell thin-wall steel with shells lined with white metal. With a considerable overlap between adjacent bearings, this provided extra stiffness to the crank. The big end journals were lightened by drilled and plugged holes that also formed sludge traps. Each crankshaft was balanced statically and then dynamically a second time after the flywheel had been

fitted. Great attention was given to counter-balancing and torsional vibration.

Con rods were also made from EN16 steel to avoid the problems experienced earlier with the Mark V pushrod engines and earlier models. Their little ends were fitted with bronze bushes and had floating gudgeon pins. Aluminium pistons were employed, without steel cylinder liners, as the bores were found to have exceptional wearing qualities, helped by chromium-plated top rings. The engines were originally listed with the option of two compression ratios, 7:1 and 8:1.



Jaguar Cars in those days was truly a manufacturer. Here an XK cylinder block is being machined. (Courtesy Jaguar Daimler Heritage Trust)



The XK six-cylinder engine, complex in its day but so well designed that it would serve many Jaguar models well for over four decades. (Author's collection)

The cylinder head design was exceptional, produced for Jaguar in Yorkshire using DTD424 alloy, the head weighing a mere 50lb, less than half that of a conventional iron head. The use of alloy also allowed the heads to be machined easily and, of course, with fewer handling problems. The valve seat angles were originally 30° for the inner and 45° for the exhaust, the seats and tappet guides being inserted into the head as one operation at very high temperature.

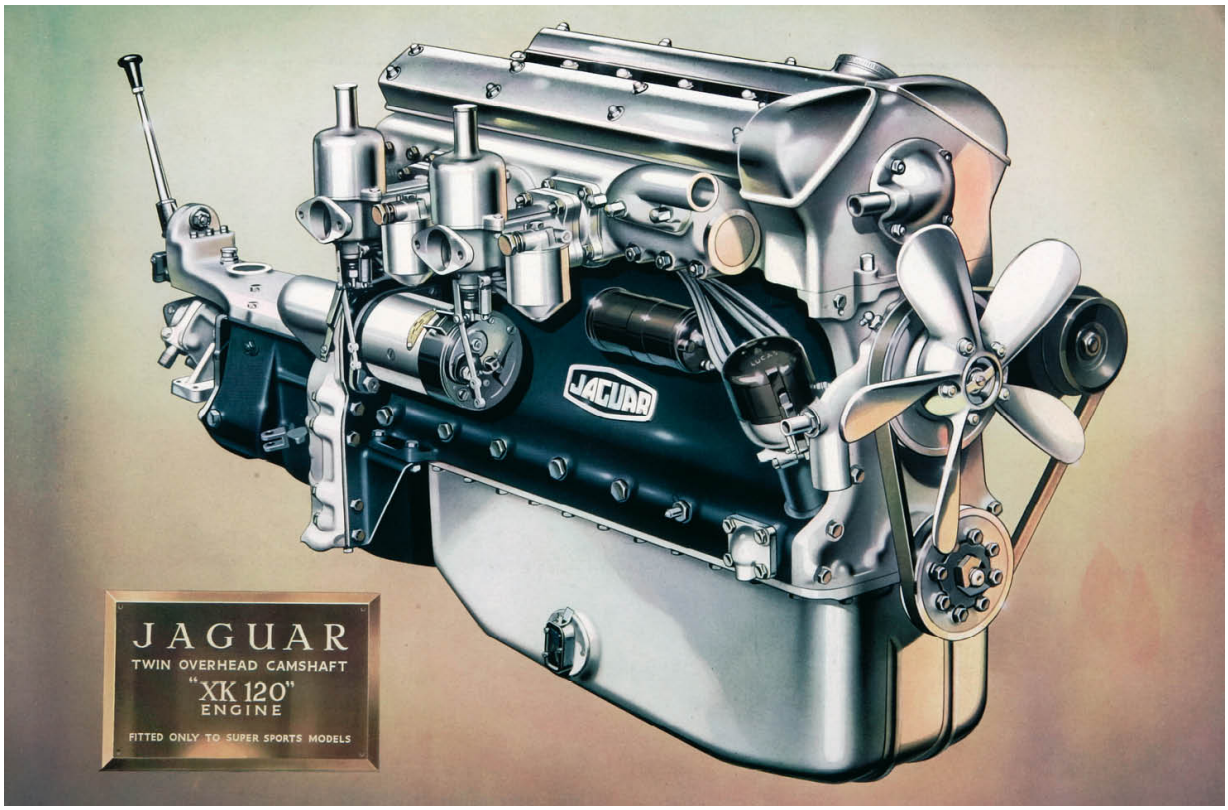
The camshafts' $\frac{5}{16}$in lift was chosen apparently to ensure that inexperienced mechanics would not have trouble with valves fouling each other while the head was being worked on. These ran in four bearings. Ease of maintenance and trouble-free running was vital if the engine was to succeed. Jaguar would not be able to afford major problems and warranty claims in this area. Tappet guides were of chilled cast iron, inlet valves of silicon-chromed steel, and exhausts of austenitic steel.

The twin ohc arrangement was highly efficient, the direct action of the cams on the valves, via tappet buckets without pushrods, reduced the

weight, alleviating wear and allowing for greater rpm in safety. The twin camshafts were driven by a Duplex timing chain arrangement operated via sprockets, which could be finely adjusted but would also allow the camshafts or head itself to be removed without upsetting the timing.

An alloy casting with water jacket formed the inlet manifold, which ensured operational temperature was achieved quickly and remained constant. Twin SU H6 1¾in carburettors were fitted as well as an auxiliary starting carburettor, operated electrically and controlled by thermostat. The two three-branch exhaust manifolds were vitreous enamelled in black and terminated in two exhaust pipes, eventually merging into one pipe for the length of the car.

A full force-fed lubrication system was employed with more than adequate passages and oilways, supplied via a conventional gear-driven pump and Tecalemit filter. Special provision was made to ensure sufficient lubricant got to the timing chains and a filtering precaution included the use of a flat-type pick-up to ensure sludge-free oil. The alloy sump pan was also ribbed internally and externally to help cooling.



The XK six-cylinder engine in all its glory as it appeared, in art form, in the original Mark V/XK120 colour brochure for 1948. (Courtesy Jaguar Cars Ltd)

A centrifugal pump and five-bladed belt-driven fan provided coolant circulation from the radiator to a special internally cast duct in the exhaust side of the block, from where it passed upwards to the head. Special care was taken to provide ample water spaces around the exhaust valves, the flow then moving across the head to the inlet side and, via the inlet manifold jacket, back to the radiator.

Last but not least mention has to be made of one of William Lyons's criteria for the new engine. It had to look good! With the highly polished camshaft covers, the vitreous enamelled exhaust manifolds, the polished carburettor dashpots and inlet manifold and many other detail items, the engine was a joy to behold and certainly had the looks to match its performance. The finished unit was a tribute to the designers and what better way to launch an entirely new and sophisticated engine than in a new sports car – the XK120.

There is an interesting comparison between the new XK twin-cam engine and the outgoing 3½-litre pushrod unit (used by Jaguar in the postwar Mark V saloons) that it effectively replaced:

Pushrod
Engine size: 3,495cc
Bore: 82mm
Stroke: 110mm
RAC rating: 25hp
Maximum bhp: 125 @ 4,250rpm
Maximum torque: 180lb ft

Twin cam
Engine size: 3,442cc
Bore: 83mm
Stroke: 106mm
RAC rating: 25.6hp
Maximum bhp: 160 @ 5,200rpm
Maximum torque: 195lb ft

The XK engine was born and proved a worthy successor to the old pushrod unit.

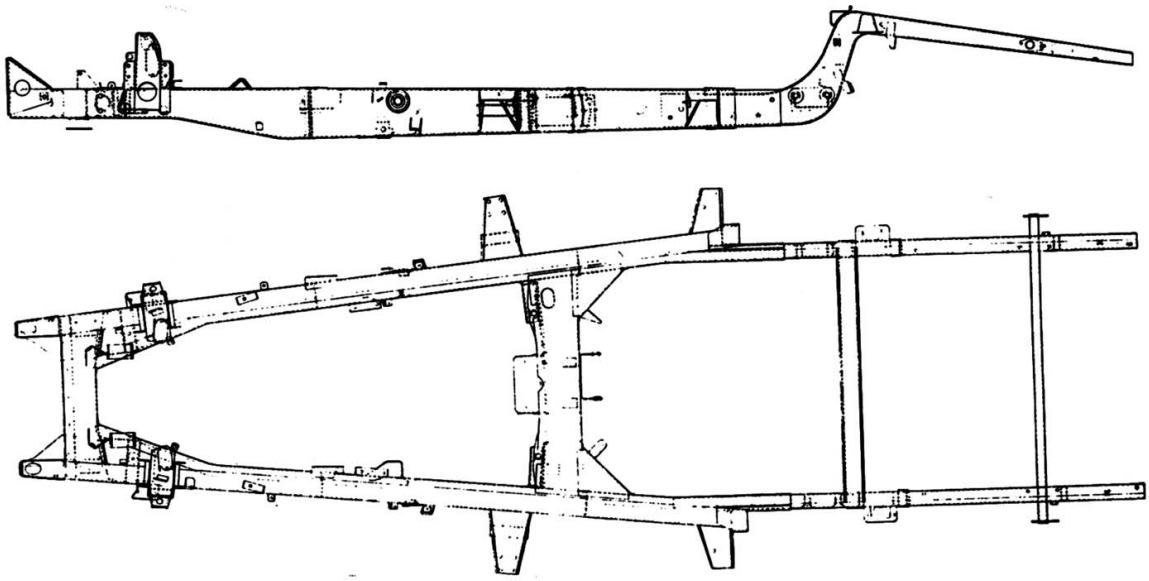
Chassis design

It was obvious that a new chassis would be required to accommodate the engine and that would include suspension changes as well. One must remember that this chassis was being designed for the new large saloon so it was exceptionally strong and rigid, so strong in fact that Jaguar claimed it was the strongest ever produced for a British car up to that time. The later idea to shorten it for use in the XK sports car was a last-minute decision and, as such, it was effectively over-engineered for that purpose.

However, the chassis wasn't just a cut-and-shut operation for the sports car. There was more to it than that. The wheelbase was 18in shorter than the saloon chassis but the front track was also 5in narrower and the wheels and tyres, because they were to carry a lesser load, were narrower as well.

Torsional rigidity was excellent with massive box-section side members,

6½in deep at their deepest point and 3½in wide, made from 14swg steel. With a wheelbase of 8ft6in, these side members ran virtually straight along the line of the frame, converging at the front and at the back before the rear axle, where they swept abruptly upwards about 18in over the axle. This area was deliberately designed to provide extra room for suspension movement, not practical with the old pre-war underslung type of chassis design.



The layout of the new Jaguar chassis as it was adapted for the XK sports car. (Author's collection)

A hefty front box-section cross-member was also fitted to enhance rigidity further and provide a good base for the front suspension.

A centrally mounted X-shaped cruciform of cross-members provided further strength in the centre of the frame between the side members; this X-brace, although needed for the longer chassis of the saloons, was not required for the short wheelbase XK sports car, hence it was removed. The XK therefore utilised a shortened (120in down to 102in) wheelbase version of the new chassis with, instead of the X-brace, a single box-section cross-member incorporating the gearbox mounting and anchorage points for the front torsion bars. The chassis for the new sports car would also need to be narrower as well as shorter, which is why 5in was removed from the width of the frame.

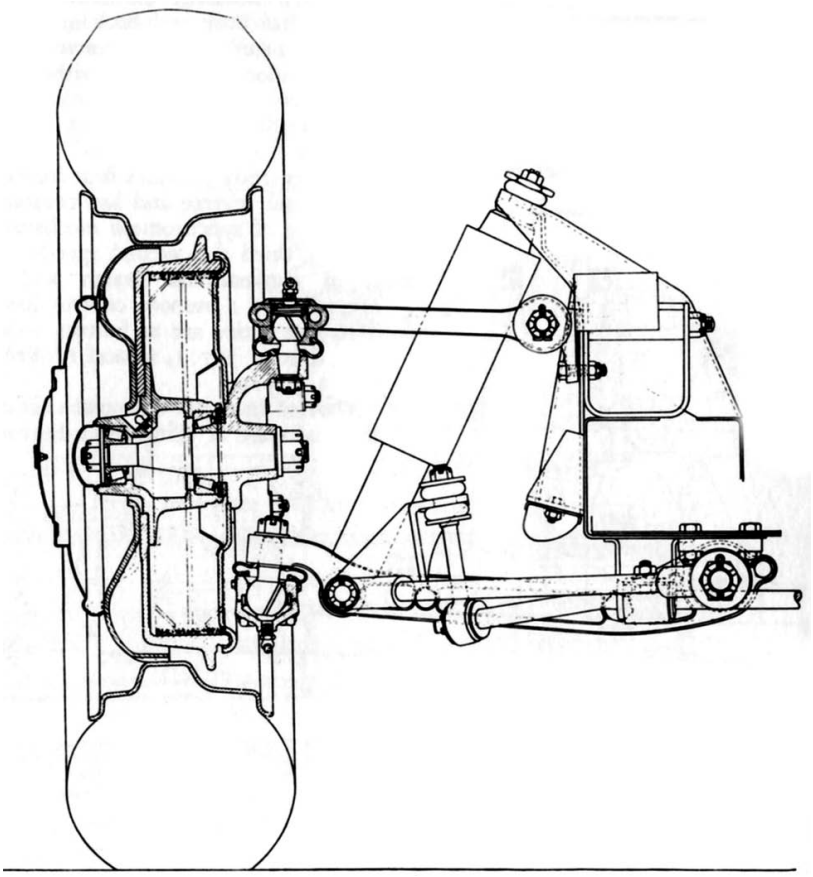
At the rear there was another cross-member in front of the rear axle and

another at the rear of the frame. This latter cross-member provided the hanging points for the rear springs and support for the rear bodywork area.

Suspension and steering

In 1934 Citroën had launched its ground-breaking Traction Avant model, which took the world by storm, and elements of its design would have a dramatic influence on future motor car design worldwide. Monocoque construction, rack-and-pinion steering, and independent torsion bar front suspension, all set the Citroën apart from the competition. Jaguar's top engineer, William Heynes, much admired what Citroën had done and saw the future in independent front suspension – vital to improve the refinement and handling of higher performance cars. The same system was also adopted by Alec Issigonis for the new Morris Minor, launched at the same time as the XK120.

Therefore serious consideration had been given to independent front suspension during the 1930s, when the company actually had a running prototype based on the old SS saloon. After study of the practical options available for the independent front suspension for the Mark VII chassis, which, of course, transposed to the XK sports car, a wishbone layout with longitudinal torsion bars was chosen. These wishbones remained small and neat in appearance.



Front suspension elevation drawing for the XK/Mark VII chassis. (Author's collection)

The principle of the system provided lateral upper and lower wishbones and longitudinal torsion bars. The lower wishbones consisted of a deep 'I'-section beam carrying the load from the front wheels and back to the torsion bar, attached at the fulcrum point below the frame. The beam itself was reinforced by a strut running from its outer end diagonally forward to an attachment beneath the front cross-member, relieving the beam from fore and aft loading. The upper wishbones were anchored on brackets above the frame.

On the outer areas of the upper and lower wishbones, ball joints carried the swivelling assembly of the stub axle and so formed the steering and suspension movement in one. Chromed ballpins were fitted into sintered bronze cups for harder wearing. The top of the wishbones were mounted on pillars projecting above the frame, also taking the inboard end of the dampers, which in this case were of the Newton telescopic type. To ensure

there was no transfer of road noise and vibration to the body, all the inboard mountings for the suspension were of the Metalastik bonded-rubber type.

The torsion bars, of silicon-manganese spring steel, were of very long at 52in (longer than any others produced at the time) with screw adjustment at the rear for ride height. The torsion bars ran back to the rear mounting points on the central cross-member.

A rubber mounted anti-roll bar, anchored under the front cross-member, linked the two lower suspension beams.

This whole front suspension package was very neatly mounted at a front chassis cross-member.

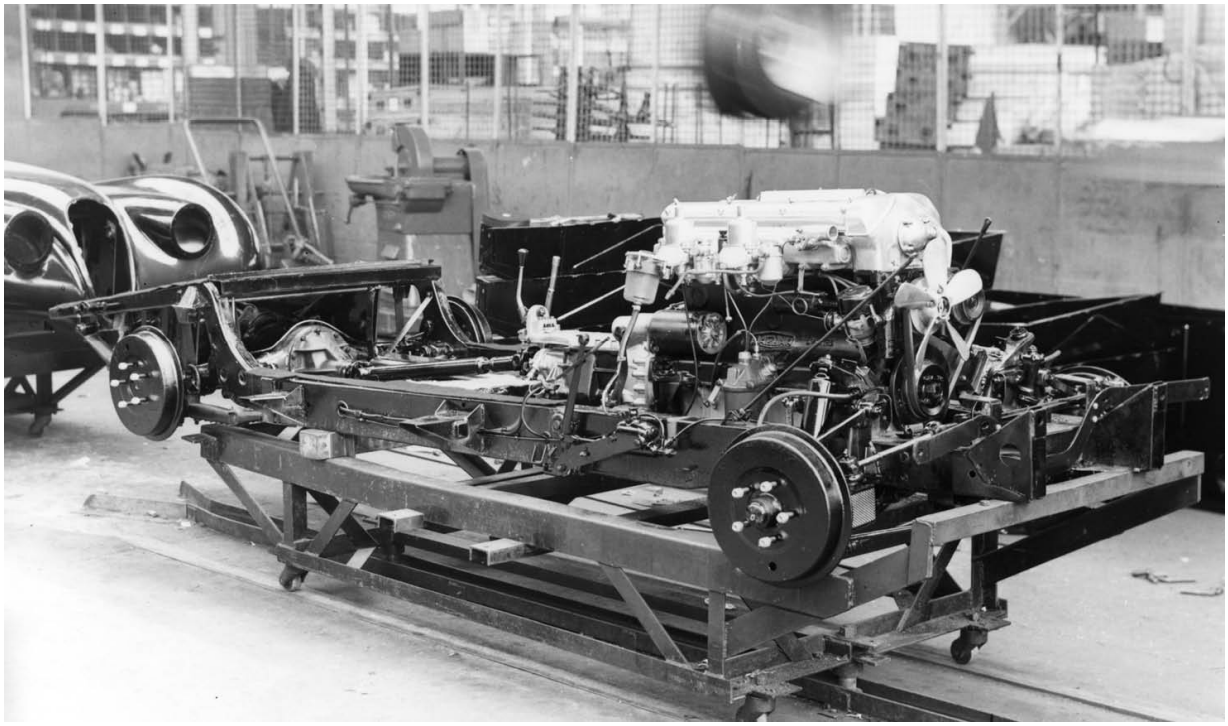
To accompany the new front suspension Jaguar installed Burman recirculating ball steering, an established brand known for lightness and freedom from kickback. In this system the steering drop-arm moved a centre track rod with an idler at the other end, the whole assembly being isolated from the suspension movement. To accommodate this for the shorter wheelbase XK sports car it was necessary to lengthen the steering column but at the same time lower it, leading to a mere 10° rake from the horizontal. Not the ideal driving position, particularly as Jaguar fitted a 17in Bluemel four-spoke cast steering wheel similar to that used on the big saloons. The system became known for a somewhat vague feel when driving in a straight line and the three lock-to-lock turns of the steering was a little excessive. However, the system was quite capable of handling the weight of the body and engine, without undue strain on the driver!

For the rear suspension, conventional semi-elliptic springs were employed, although softer and 6in longer than used before to improve the ride quality. Typical Girling PV7 lever-arm dampers were used, still mounted on the frame side-members immediately ahead of the axle.

Transmission

Transferring the power from the engine to the rear axle was done via the same Jaguar-designed gearbox used on the postwar Mark IV and Mark V models. Manufactured by the well-known Moss company in the West Midlands, it was a conventional four-speed type with no synchromesh on first gear and operated via a remote control gear lever. It was strong unit, although a little noisy and not best known for its refinement. However, it would be used throughout the production of XKs and into E-types of the

1960s. A normal Borg & Beck dry plate 10in clutch was fitted and the power transmitted from the gearbox via a one-piece Hardy Spicer propshaft with universal joints. Initially an ENV rear axle was fitted with hypoid bevel gears in the differential with semi-floating half-shafts, the system also used on the postwar saloon models.



One of the early XK120 chassis on the assembly track at the Jaguar factory, complete with front and rear axles, engine and transmission. (Courtesy Jaguar Daimler Heritage Trust)

Braking system

This new chassis configuration was Jaguar's first to use an hydraulic braking system. For the original chassis, and the Mark V saloon in which it was launched, a Girling system with twin leading shoes at the front was employed but for the XK this was of Lockheed manufacture. The brake pedal operated a single master cylinder mounted on the chassis with slave cylinders transferring the effort to the brake shoes. Because the new chassis was designed to accept much smaller 16in diameter wheels, the size of the brake drums was limited to a maximum size of 12in diameter by 2¼in wide. The combination of a heavy car with quite narrow tyres (600 x 16in on 5in

rims) and track, plus the improved performance from the XK engine, initially meant that for strength only steel wheels would be fitted. However, the use of steel wheels provided little ventilation for the brakes, so the system was not up to the performance of the car. Brake fade was a common occurrence, for which Jaguars of this period became well known.

Bodywork and styling

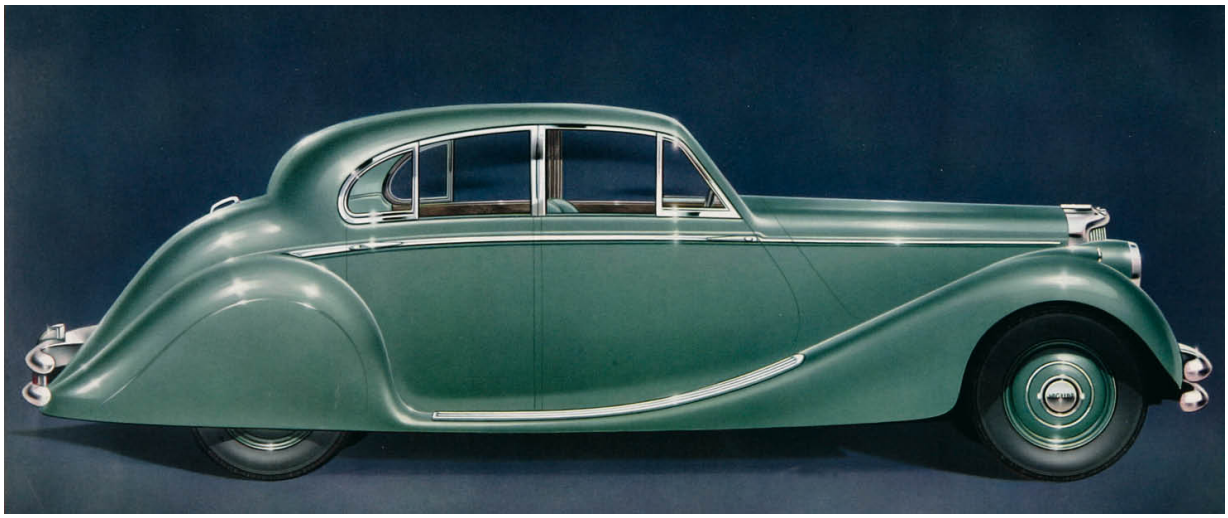
One has to look at the XK120 as a triumph for William Lyons and his team and one of those rare icons that set the postwar scene in sports car design.

The production of a postwar sports car was certainly not a priority, nor was it conceived when Lyons prompted the development of the twin-cam engine and the 100mph luxury saloon. In terms of pre-war production, the SS100 had amounted to a very small percentage of the saloon figure and the very fact that Jaguar did not resurrect the model postwar seemed to indicate that a sports car project was not on the cards.

However, it appears that the concept of a sports car came about around 1947, when a small car was conceived and mocked-up but then abandoned. Apparently William Lyons had visited the 1946 Paris Motor Show and seen much of interest relating to all-enveloping styling, which could have influenced him both in the final outcome of the Mark VII and, of course, the XK.

It is probably best to assume that although work had progressed very well on the Mark VII to be, it was going to take a while to bring both the XK engine and the new large all-steel saloon body into production. This then introduces the story of the Mark V.

The Mark V, apparently so named because it was the fifth prototype produced, came about as a necessity to develop a new model to increase sales and take advantage of some of the advances the company had made in the design of the front independent suspension and chassis. That car was launched at the British Motor Show in October 1948.



The Mark V saloon was Jaguar's first new postwar model. Although based on pre-war styling, under the skin it concealed a new chassis and suspension design, destined for better things. (Courtesy Jaguar Cars Ltd)

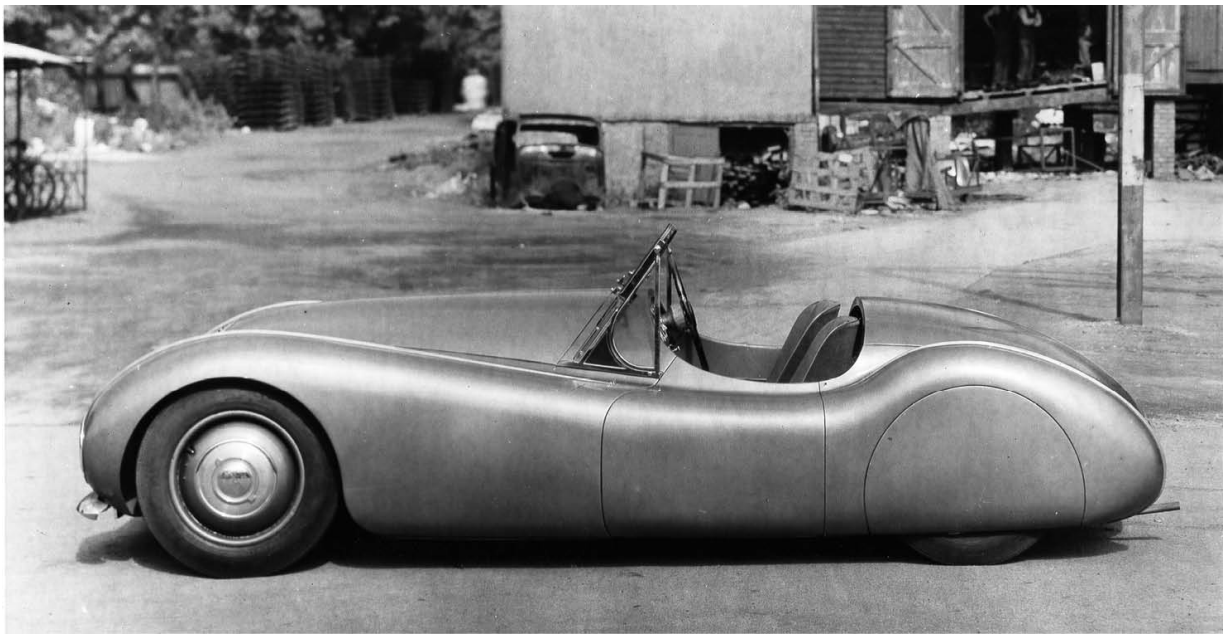
With the Mark V set for launch and much work finished on the Mark VII (although nowhere near ready to be exhibited) attention again turned to the possibility of producing a new, but low volume, sports car to launch alongside the Mark V, more as a concept and spectacle for the show. Design pictures within the Jaguar Daimler Heritage Trust archive show examples of styling mock-ups created earlier, probably relating to a smaller car altogether than the eventual XK and probably to be powered by one of the four-cylinder engines. This project came to nothing and was abandoned completely with no other records remaining. It is therefore all the more fascinating to realise that the final design of the XK came into being probably just weeks, or even days, before the 1948 Motor Show.

When William Lyons announced the Mark V to the press on 30 September, he actually made direct reference to the intention to produce such a sports car but no one expected it to appear at the London Motor Show the following month!

The prototypes, like the early production examples, were built using traditional car body-assembly methods; aluminium panelling was grafted on to a mixture of wooden and steel framing. This came partly by necessity (because of the difficulty in acquiring steel just after the war) and partly because aluminium panel forming was less expensive than tooling up for

steel production and easy to work with, given the company's experience pre-war. There was also the time element – it would not have been possible to launch a steel-bodied XK at the 1948 Motor Show because of the lead time a pressings company needed to tool up for such a project.

The principle of the sports car design was to take styling cues from the yet-to-be Mark VII saloon to form a strong family resemblance and also to take note of current and perhaps future trends in styling. Attention was being drawn to aerodynamics, spurred on by foreign designers, and the crop of new curvaceous styling coming on to the market must have had an effect on the way William Lyons designed the car. Typical of the new cars of the period were the Austin A90 Atlantic with the swept back wing line and fully enclosed rear wheels and the Bristol 401 with severe sloping rear and curvaceous front wings. There were other exciting new designs like that from Jowett with its futuristic Javelin saloon.



An earlier postwar attempt at a new, small sports car for Jaguar that came to nothing but even here one can see design pointers to the later XK design. (Courtesy Jaguar Daimler Heritage Trust)

One could argue that William Lyons was very taken with the 1940 BMW 328 that competed in the Mille Miglia that year. Postwar, two of these cars were imported into the UK by Fraser Nash with a view to selling them

under its name. The actual design, as the picture shows, is incredibly close to the XK and there are other examples of pre-war design, particularly from Italy, that will have influenced the final shape of Jaguar's postwar styling.

The XK120 bodies were constructed from a relatively large number of pressings, which came from a number of suppliers. The only bodywork sections that came as an integrated unit were the front and rear wings, both handmade. Therefore the whole assembly of the original aluminium XK120s was somewhat over-complex.

Although the majority of the car was built of aluminium, the front bulkhead, inner wheelarches, boot area, and rear bulkhead plus rear inner wings were steel. The bonnet was all aluminium and the doors and boot lid were aluminium skinned on to an ash frame, just as the rear section of the bodywork was ash framed. Even the A-posts that secured the doors and bulkhead were a composite of wood faced in aluminium. The sills were also of wood with steel supporting a plywood floor, protected from heat in those days by asbestos!

The steel sections were pressed and out-sourced. The alloy panels were produced for Jaguar by Abbey Panels, which had a long association with Jaguar. The final assembly of all the panels took place at Jaguar's Foleshill factory in Coventry, as a separate entity to the main production line and the Mark V saloon.

Typical of a new crop of styling cues coming through on cars in the late 1940s like this Austin Atlantic, in essence not that far away from Jaguar's XK. (Author's collection)

The BMW design that is said to have influenced William Lyons in the styling of the XK. (Courtesy BMW Archive)

Manufacturing the XK120

The procedure for assembling the XK120 post-1948 was very different to building a car today. For example, the Foleshill (later Browns Lane) plants where the cars were built were very much manufacturing sites; that is most things were produced in the factory by Jaguar's own staff. Today most 'production' is out-sourced, arriving at the assembly trackside 'just in time' for each car.

In the days of the XK120 things were very different. Take the XK engine for example: while items like the casting of blocks and heads was done externally, the entire finishing and assembly process was carried out at Jaguar. Every engine in those days was test-run for three hours at 2,000rpm. Then adjustments were carried out, after which the engine was dynamometer tested running for a further hour, at full load at 1,600rpm. Even after these engines were given a series of five-minute stages at 1,000, 2,000, and 3,000rpm at full load and full throttle, then finally taken up to maximum peak revs for a flash test and brake-horse-power check.

At Jaguar there were departments such as the machine shop where many components were produced on lathes (connecting rods, water pumps, gearbox top covers, timing covers) and the rough cylinder heads and blocks were machined. Gearboxes and rear axle units were out-sourced, in many

cases taken from the parts bins used by other manufacturers as well.

Although the larger alloy and steel panelling was out-sourced, a large percentage of the smaller items were pressed at Jaguar.

Production under way at the old Foleshill plant in Coventry. The occasional XK120 is interspersed with the mainstream Mark V models on the line. (Courtesy Jaguar Daimler Heritage Trust)

Apart from the hand-finished aluminium bodies for the earliest XKs, by 1950 steel production had been geared up and so the bodies were brought in, sectionalised, from Fisher & Ludlow elsewhere in the Midlands. The major components of the later bodies were the front end, rear end, door assemblies, and a 'bridged assembly' (as Jaguar called it), forming the basic structure on to which everything else was hung.

Jaguar, however, always painted its own bodies in the factory, by this time using synthetic enamel as opposed to the old system of cellulose.

As all XKs had separate chassis, these were constructed away from the

bodies and passed down the chassis track. There they acquired their various components, including front and rear suspension and finally the engine and transmission, before the painted bodies were mounted.

Jaguar's trim shop provided all the trim required, made to order, for each XK including headlinings, carpets, seats, door pads, and everything else needed for the interior of the cars. Alongside this the wood shop supplied much of the wood required for both the construction of the bodywork and detail trim: everything from the plywood backing for the facia to veneers for the fixed-head and drophead coupé models.

Everything came together on the assembly and trim tracks. Unique to Jaguar at the time was the fact that the interior trim was fitted *after* the bodies had been mounted on the chassis. This was to avoid damage to the trim. Incidentally, by the time of the move from Foleshill to Browns Lane, XK120s were produced alongside Mark V models.

The XK120 had been designed and built for its first showing at the British Motor Show. What would the future hold for this new concept?

The engine test facility. An interesting point is that in those early days of the XK engine, they were all tested on town gas, not petrol, because it was cheaper! (Courtesy Jaguar Daimler Heritage Trust)

The industrious trim shop, circa 1950. (Courtesy Jaguar Daimler Heritage Trust)

Jaguar XK120
1948–1954

(Courtesy Tom Wood)

1948
From concept to production

Times were tough in the early postwar years. In order to equip our expanding armies during the Second World War we were involved in the lend-lease programme borrowing billions of dollars from the United States to fund it all. After the war this money had to be paid back and one way of doing this was to trade with the US to offset the debts and with other countries to bring in money. Car manufacturers were a prime target in this export drive and although the Board of Trade had sanctioned the development of new cars, there were severe restrictions on the supply of raw materials for the purpose. Manufacturers had to export the majority of their production and in some cases, like that of Jaguar, this meant creating new markets. No exports meant no allocation of raw materials to build cars.

We tend to think that the US has always been the strongest export market for British cars and although it was true later on, it certainly wasn't pre-war or immediately postwar. American car production was thriving and the cost of British cars over there made them rather prohibitive.

Postwar export markets

The true state of play for our car exports at the time was: Australia 33 per cent, Canada 14 per cent, South Africa 7 per cent, Belgium and New Zealand 5 per cent each, Brazil 3 per cent, Eire and the US 2.5 per cent each, Holland 2 per cent, Switzerland 1 per cent, with all other markets totalling 25 per cent.

Penetrating the US market was therefore a challenge and to improve the situation the British Government in September 1949 devalued the pound by 30 per cent against the dollar. The immediate effect of this was to make British exports much cheaper. Unfortunately it also increased the price of our imported raw materials and oil! However, it had the desired effect and led to the US becoming our most prominent market, from which, of course, Jaguar ultimately benefited.

Covenants and high purchase tax

On the domestic market in those postwar days we Brits barely had a chance to get our hands on a new car. In fact you had to convince a faceless government official that it was essential you had a car and only then would you be permitted a certificate enabling you to buy one. Even then the problem was finding a new car with so much production going abroad, and this pumped up the price of pre-war cars considerably, including SS and Jaguars.

In 1946, even *if* you had convinced the official that you should have a new car you had to sign a legally binding document stating that you would not resell it for at least six months; in 1948 this period was increased to a year and later to two years before it was finally abandoned in 1953. If these were not disincentives enough, prior to the launch of the XK120 the government temporarily removed the fuel rationing allowance of a mere 180 miles per month, making it virtually impossible to drive anyway!

Even when things returned to a modicum of normality, by the time of the first postwar British Motor Show (the first since 1938) in October 1948, purchase tax on new cars had been hyped up to 66⅔ per cent on cars costing over £1,000, forcing many manufacturers (including Jaguar) to pitch their prices strategically below this figure.

Nevertheless the first British Motor Show opened on 27 October and released a pent-up demand and enthusiasm for postwar motoring. Eleven major new models were announced covering a diverse range of cars from the humble Bond three-wheeler, through the major export earner Standard Vanguard, to the Land-Rover, Morris Minor and, of course the Jaguar Mark V and XK120.

It is difficult to imagine the impact the XK120 made in 1948 on a motoring public who had been starved of new cars for so long. Even then, being tempted by such a technically advanced sports car, people had little chance of owning one!

Jaguar becomes a brand

Postwar there had been many changes in the company. Firstly William Lyons sold off the sidecar business, intending to concentrate totally on car production. With this came the change of company name to Jaguar Cars Limited, something he had seriously contemplated pre-war anyway. Now

spurred on by the similarity of the SS insignia to the German connection, Jaguar became the brand name of the motor cars from then onwards.

Simple but effective. No unnecessary external adornment, yet an impressive frontal appearance. This later model shows the fared-in sidelight pods. (Courtesy Tom Wood)

Motor Show debut

With the concept XK now finalised for September 1948, the one-off car was hastily prepared for display at the British Motor Show the following month. What better time to show such a car than at the very first postwar British show when everyone was desperate to see the latest motor cars in such austere times. It was a great showroom for the British motor industry at a time when we desperately needed to export all the goods we could produce to earn foreign currency, bringing it back into the country to pay off our war debts.

Seen as a great public relations exercise, showing the XK at the same time as the launch of the 'new' Mark V saloon also highlighted the XK engine that would power the next generation of Jaguars.

William Lyons knew the benefits of cultivating the media. Just as he had announced the launch of the SS Jaguar 2½-litre saloon so professionally at the Mayfair Hotel in London in 1935, so a similar scenario for the launch of the XK took place. A few days before the Motor Show, the press was invited to view the car at the Henlys Jaguar showroom in London where it achieved much acclaim. On the preview day of the 1948 Motor show on 27 October, the Jaguar stand was dominated by the new XK and the XK engine, despite the fact that it was the Mark V saloon that held the greatest hopes for the company at the time.

The actual original prototype hastily built and prepared for the 1948 British Motor Show. This really was a mock-up with many unusual features such as the number plate mounting at the front and the handmade bumper bars, painted with chrome edging. (Courtesy Jaguar Daimler Heritage Trust)

The same prototype (Earls Court Motor Show car) showing the original rear-end treatment with the full-width bumper trim and unique lighting. (Courtesy Jaguar Daimler Heritage Trust)

The single XK exhibited was not identified as either an XK120 or the smaller engined XK100, although we now know that it was eventually registered HKV455, then with the straight-six engine. This was the original first XK built (chassis number 66001), recognisable from the front because of the lack of brake cooling vents in the front wings underneath the bumper bars, a fuel filler accessed from inside the boot, the lack of rear overriders, smaller tail lamps, and the simple mounting of the rear number plate direct to the body. As well as being the display vehicle for the launch, it was depicted, stylised, in the XK120 brochures, still showing many of its unique features. Later it was altered outwardly to the production specification with the fitting of conventional rear lighting and bumpers. In this form it was used by Prince Bira on several occasions, not least the first XK outing at Silverstone (see the next chapter). This first XK was also loaned to *The Motor* magazine for its road test in 1949 and then used as an experimental vehicle for testing disc brakes for the racing C-types.

At the Earls Court Motor Show, examples of both four- and six-cylinder engines were on display because the original intention was to launch both models. The irony here is that both cars were to be sold at exactly the same price of £988!

From this one can conclude that there would be no logical reason for anyone to buy the lower performance model as fuel consumption would be little different and the previous taxation issue based on engine size or horsepower no longer applied. Although the XK100 remained listed for

some time afterwards, the author is confident that none were actually produced for sale.

Was this a repeat performance from the 1930s with the SS Jaguar? Yes, very much so, as the press was somewhat overwhelmed, not only by the beauty of the new curvaceous styling and by the anticipated performance of over 100mph with matching acceleration, but also with the suggested price of under £1,000.

This stylised picture used for the XK brochures was adapted from the real photograph of the Earls Court Motor Show car. (Courtesy Jaguar Cars Ltd)

What the XK cost at its launch in 1948

Model: XK100
Basic: £988
Purchase tax: £275 3s 11d
Total in UK: £1,263 3s 11d
Model: XK120
Basic: £988
Purchase tax: £275 3s 11d
Total in UK: £1,263 3s 11d

'It can't be done for the price and it won't last,' stated John Bolster of the British *Autosport* magazine, a comment echoed by many and epitomising the commonly held belief about the XK, but one that was totally unfounded.

The purchase tax distortion

Taxation issues on motor cars were much in evidence at the time. For cars costing £1,000 and more the purchase tax levied by the British Government was increased from 33⅓ per cent to a whopping 66⅔ per cent. Had the XK120 been sold for just £1,000, the overall cost to the buyer would have ended up at nearly £1,560, whereas at the price of £988 quoted the total cost inclusive of purchase tax was only £1,263 – a significant difference!

However, it could be argued that the XK120 was too cheap and if Jaguar had attempted to charge the price that such a car really warranted, it may or

may not have been the success it was.

Rather embarrassingly, the public reaction to the car was quite unexpected and Jaguar knew that production wouldn't be able to get under way for several months. The handbuilt nature of the car with an ash frame and hand-formed aluminium panelling was something of a throwback for Jaguar as it had abandoned such processes in the late 1930s. Jaguar's US distributors were at the show and knew instantly it was what they needed for the American market, so it was inevitable that they would demand and take the first year's complete production of the new car.

The competition: what competition?

It is, however, worth putting the XK120 into the context of 1948 and other cars at the show. The importance of this event was such that it showed the way forward for UK exports, so vital at that time. With manufacturers showing so many new models, there was much excitement, and quite rightly so. Vying for attention as well as the new Jaguar were the new Land-Rover, Morris Minor, and Citroën 2CV.

Let's take, for example, one of the UK's major exporters, Austin. For 1948 it introduced the A90 Atlantic and as the name implies this was a car squarely aimed at the overseas market with swept back styling, fully enclosed rear wheels, and a convertible body. Costing a basic £745 for export or £953 with British purchase tax, the Atlantic provides a clear indication of how attractively priced the Jaguar XK120 was. MG was Britain's largest exporter of sports cars although at the Motor Show it merely displayed its traditionally styled and built TC model (costing a basic £412 or £528 with purchase tax). To a large extent, MG epitomised the state of play in the UK sports car market at the time.

At the other end of the price scale was the new Bristol 401, a wonderfully aerodynamic two-door coupé, handbuilt to aircraft standards but at a price – £1,925 basic or £3,213 in the UK! Then there was the Daimler 2½-litre DB18 Special Sports at £1,500 for export or £2,335 in the UK. The original design of the Fraser Nash was very close to the XK120 but in reality, when it was finally announced as a supposed production model, it had a different styling approach and cost over £2,200 without purchase tax!

So far so good. What the above lost to Jaguar in financial terms was further emphasised by the performance differential and the engineering

behind the new XK power unit.

That brings us to another new model for 1948, the Lagonda 2½-Litre. Not a direct competitor with the XK by any means – the drophead cost £2,198 without purchase tax – but significantly bringing into production the W. O. Bentley-designed twin ohc straight-six engine. There was a lot of similarity in the design and look of the Lagonda and Jaguar engines and, of course, the Bentley-designed unit would go on to power true competitors to Jaguar, the Aston Martins, in the 1950s.

The actual competition for the XK120, both in new and existing models, did not exist on price but in terms of sports car performance.

The XK120 and its rivals in 1948

Make and model: Alfa Romeo 6C 2500
Power: 106bhp
Top speed: 105mph
Price in UK: –

Make and model: Allard K1
Power: 140bhp
Top speed: 86mph
Price in UK: £1,238

Make and model: Bristol 401
Power: 100bhp
Top speed: 104mph
Price in UK: £3,213

Make and model: Cisitalia 202 Grand Sport
Power: 66bhp
Top speed: 90mph
Price in UK: –

Make and model: Delage T175
Power: 140bhp
Top speed: 112mph
Price in UK: –

Make and model: Ferrari 166
Power: 150bhp
Top speed: 130mph
Price in UK: –

Make and model: Frazer Nash Fast Tourer
Power: 125bhp
Top speed: 125mph
Price in UK: £2,724
Make and model: Jaguar XK120
Power: 160bhp
Top speed: 120mph
Price in UK: £1,263
Make and model: Talbot Grand Sport 26CV
Power: 210bhp
Top speed: 124mph
Price in UK: –

The serious performance competition came from abroad, another irony as the same applies today with Jaguar's equivalent XK! All these cars, without exception, were more expensive than the XK120 and were produced in significantly smaller numbers; the foreign models were not available for purchase in the UK in 1948. So the choice was very limited for anyone wanting a sports car with such vivacious styling and performance. It must also have made existing buyers of other cars sit up and think. It was clear at this very early stage that Jaguar had the market to itself with the XK120.

SS100 and XK120 compared

It's inevitable that comparisons would be made between the 1930s Jaguar sports car and the all new 1940s XK120, showing up some interesting information.

The engines had remarkably similar dimensions and although the performance of the twin cam engined XK120 should be superior to the SS100, the former's figures are obviously brought down by the extra weight of the car, despite the fact that it is aerodynamically superior. The figure for weight quoted is that for the original aluminium-bodied cars; later steel bodies were about 50lb heavier so performance figures would be worse.

Not only was the new car heavier but it was also bigger and had smaller drum brakes – dictated by the smaller diameter wheels fitted. Nevertheless the twin cam engine came into its own as the speed increased. A major improvement over the pre-war car came not only in styling and comfort but

also in ride and handling.

It is also interesting to compare basic prices (without tax). The SS100 with the 3½-litre engine went out of production pre-war at £445. The XK120 came in at £988.

The early aluminium-bodied XK120 Roadster. (Courtesy Author)

SS100 3½ litre

Engine: Straight-six ohc
Capacity: 3,485cc
Bore and stroke: 82mm x 110mm
Maximum power: 125bhp @ 4,250rpm
Maximum torque: 120lb ft @ 2,000rpm
Compression ratio: 7:1
Carburettors: Two 1½in SU
Gearbox
  Overall ratios: Four-speed
  1st: 12.04:1
  2nd: 7.06:1
  3rd: 4.58:1
  Top: 3.80:1
Suspension
  Front: Beam axle, semi-elliptic springs
  Rear: Live axle, semi-elliptic springs
Brakes: 14in Girling drums, rod operated
Wheels and tyres: 5.50 x 18in
Dimensions
  Length: 12ft 9in
  Width: 5ft 3in
  Height (to top of screen): 4ft 6in
  Wheelbase: 8ft 8in
  Weight: 23¼cwt
Performance
  Top speed: 101mph

Standing quarter mile: 17.1 sec
0–50mph: 7.1 sec
0–60mph: 10.9sec
0–70mph: 15.4sec
Overall fuel consumption: 21mpg

XK120 3.4 litre

Engine: Straight-six twin ohc
Capacity: 3,442cc
Bore and stroke: 83mm x 106mm
Maximum power: 160bhp @ 5,200rpm
Maximum torque: 195lb ft @ 2,500rpm
Compression ratio: 7:1 or 8:1
Carburettors: Two 1¾in SU
Gearbox
Overall ratios: Four-speed
1st: 12.29:1
2nd: 7.22:1
3rd: 4.98:1
Top: 3.64:1
Suspension
Front: Independent, wishbones, torsion bars
Rear: Live axle, semi-elliptic springs
Brakes: 12in Lockheed drums, hydraulic
Wheels and tyres: 6.00 x 16in
Dimensions
Length: 14ft 6in
Width: 5ft 1½in
Height (to top of screen): 4ft 4½in
Wheelbase: 8ft 6in
Weight: 25½cwt
Performance
Top speed: 124mph
Standing quarter mile: 17.0sec
0–50mph: 7.3sec
0–60mph: 10.0sec

0–70mph: 12.4sec
Overall fuel consumption: 19.8mpg

The XK's exterior style

The frontal aspect of the XK introduced the world to a new look for Jaguar, one that was not dissimilar to the soon-to-be-announced mark VII and that would be seen subsequently on the compact saloons, still in favour as late as 1968. The simplicity of the exterior design was purity itself and that was part of the magic of the overall concept of the XK120.

The nature of the front wings curving down to below bumper bar level with separate chromium-plated sidelamp pods on top created a beautiful line across the doors and down to meet the rear wings. The front wings enclosed the large Lucas PF770 tripod headlamps with chromed surrounds and neat 'spears' atop. For the US market, even in those days, sealed-beam headlamps were obligatory so most XKs were shipped without lamps fitted so that sealed-beam units could be installed over there. This necessitated broader chrome surrounds, as the sealed beam lenses were smaller in diameter. A simple approach to bumper bar treatment was provided by slim quarter bumpers that provided little protection in reality, underneath which were brake cooling ducts cut into the front wings. These quarter bumpers were secured through the wings directly to the chassis via exposed spring steel brackets.

The relative simplicity of the frontal appearance of the XK120 is emphasised by the extensive use of chrome. (Courtesy Author)

Despite the hastily conceived design of the XK120, the attention to detail is incredible. The almost sculptured bumper bars and the way the bracketry is finished entering the wing area, the prominent Lucas headlamps and the chromium-plated 'spears' to add a touch of speed, clearly show off Lyons's flair for detail. (Courtesy Tom Wood)

The XK120 is awash with curves and style. The early cars featured these separate sidelamp pods but notice the curvature wherever you look across the front wing area. (Courtesy Author)

The oval radiator (chromium-plated on brass) featured 13 vertical slats forming an integral part of the alligator-style bonnet. Above the grille, set into the bonnet, was a jaguar's head emblem enclosed within a bronze and cream base – the only physical indication that this was a Jaguar. It was probably the first showing of the 'growler' image externally on a car, a feature still used today on modern Jaguars. The number plate was mounted on a separate plinth below the bumper (to avoid the radiator grille when the bonnet opened) but on US export cars a separate mounting plate had to be provided, usually on the right-hand side above the bumper.

The split vee-shaped front windscreen was mounted in a chromium-plated brass frame attached to the scuttle. This frame could be removed, hence some cars featured aero screens to good effect for competition purposes. For most markets the usual toughened windscreen was fitted but for the US a laminated screen had to be supplied.

From the side view the unadorned simplicity of the styling enhanced the overall appearance of an aerodynamic and fast looking sports car. It is no wonder the image has stood the test of time and has been stylised so many times in posters, sculptures, and other images. The gentle sweep down of the front wing line across the door and up over the rear wheelarch shows a purity of uninterrupted beauty, and even the cutaway shaping of the doors looks like a deliberate act to emphasise the rest of the car's superb styling.

Whether by accident or design, the fitment of conventional steel disc wheels with hubcaps and the fully enclosing rear wheel spats set off the design to best advantage. Even the early use of partly painting the hubcaps to match the exterior colour of the car seemed right.

One cannot fail to admire the purity of line of the Lyons design and see the origins of the style taken from the yet-to-be-announced Mark VII saloon. (Courtesy Tom Wood)

The first evidence of the now well-known 'growler' badge on the exterior of a Jaguar. (Courtesy Tom Wood)

The early XK120 Roadsters incorporated a unique style of rubber mounting for joining the windscreen to the body as shown here. (Courtesy Tom Wood)

Hubcaps on the early XK120s were always painted in body colour. (Courtesy Author)

It is interesting that from the side view the only brightwork items identifiable on the early cars were the chrome-plated sidelamp mountings atop the front wings and at the rear the alloy lamp plinths and the chromium-plated hinged cover over the T-handle escutcheon for the wheel spats. These were secured in position by two hooks at the bottom and a budget lock at the top – a different arrangement from the Mark VII or later 2.4 saloons.

At the rear the theme of simplicity and curvaceousness continued. Not even quarter bumpers here but merely vertical overriders and the small rear lamps enclosed in polished surrounds. The large rear 'deck' of the rear tonneau panel area and the boot lid gently swept down to meet the only part that takes away from the whole – the obligatory rear number-plate housing. Even the fuel filler was hidden beneath a cover so as not to spoil the overall effect.

The final design of the XK can best be described as inspiring and must have been considered as much a culture shock in 1948 as the E-type was in 1961.

The decorative rear wheel spats could be easily removed to change a wheel and were mostly abandoned when racing or by private owners as the cars got older. (Courtesy Tom Wood)

The limited rear protection left the XK120 vulnerable to damage. (Courtesy Tom Wood)

The beautifully balanced lines of the XK120 can be seen from any angle. (Courtesy Tom Wood)

Impressive interior

Internally the strictly two-seater cockpit was certainly better equipped than the pre-war SS100. Despite the fact that it was slightly narrower than the SS, the XK120 made better use of the chassis width because the body was extended beyond the chassis, allowing more elbow room for both occupants. However, in other areas the XK120 was a somewhat awkward car for the driver. With the enormous 17in Bluemel steering wheel and the almost vertical position of the wheel and column, along with a slightly offset driving position, there wasn't a lot of room for a tall driver.

However, the XK was superbly upholstered in leather with wide split-bench seating, the backs of which were slightly shaped to good effect and could be tilted forward for access to the rear. Between the seats a neatly upholstered panel formed a useful area over the transmission tunnel, and there was the option of two-tone colour upholstery, something new for Jaguar.

The stylish but simple theme continued to the interior, although the dashboard still looked more businesslike than many other contemporary sporting cars. (Courtesy Author)

Somewhat unusual for a sports car was the split-bench style seating, which provided little lateral support during spirited driving. (Courtesy Author)

The Bluemel four-spoke 17in diameter steering wheel became an instant recognition point for Jaguar in the 1950s with the XK120's bulbous horn button in the centre. (Courtesy Author)

The door panels were also now better upholstered and incorporated pockets for storage, and the whole interior was well carpeted in a colour to match the trim.

The dashboard looked impressive, leather covered on a plywood backing board. The layout roughly followed previous Jaguar saloon car practice with a comprehensive range of instruments: large-diameter speedometer and rev counter, individual fuel and amp gauges, plus an integrated oil pressure/water temperature gauge. Interesting quirks of the period were the rev counter that ran anti-clockwise and the fuel gauge that, at the touch of a button, would supposedly record the amount of oil in the engine sump (although very unreliably!). Jaguar's usual push-button starter was incorporated and there was even a cigar lighter fitted! A heater was not supplied initially for the XK.

Sun visors were not fitted to the car and the quite small rear-view mirror was mounted on top of the dashboard scuttle area, which also had a degree of what we would today term as crash padding.

The short stubby gear lever was mounted centrally above a pronounced transmission tunnel, suitably carpeted, with an access panel to check the gearbox oil level. A sporting feature was the chromium-plated fly-off handbrake lever, which was situated on the passenger side of the transmission tunnel on both right- and left-hand-drive models.

Oddments storage space was minimal but there was a shelf area behind the seating, where the hood was also stored when it was furled. The shelf lifted to gain access to the twin six-volt batteries. The shaping of the seats and the curvature of the rear bodywork meant this rear-of-seat area was totally hidden from view normally.

The doors incorporated map pockets and had a simple sliding opener with leather-covered pull. (Courtesy Author)

The leather-covered facia boasted an impressive array of instruments and there was a 'fly-off' handbrake on the left of the transmission tunnel. (Courtesy Tom Wood)

The XK had an unusual method of jacking when it was necessary to change a wheel. A compartment accessed from inside the car just ahead of each seat provided access through the floor!

As there was only one body style for the Roadster, or Super Sports Two Seater as it was officially known, there had to be a reasonable hood arrangement to provide protection during inclement weather conditions. The single piece quality mohair hood incorporated a neat but small Perspex rear screen with chromium surround. It was attached to the screen via an over-centre catch in the middle and two hooks, one either side of the screen pillars. The hood was fitted to a chromium-plated metal frame initially (later painted to save money).

All cars were also supplied with a full-length tonneau cover and sidescreens that, when removed from the car, could be stored in a neat area behind the rear tonneau cover.

The boot area was limited by the very nature of the short wheelbase of the car and the severe slope of the boot lid. However, this was quite cavernous for a sports car in those days. At the rear of the boot was the 15-gallon petrol tank (shaped to accept some of the curvature of the spare wheel) and in the luggage area there was a false floor made of plywood (but carpeted) under which could be found the spare wheel and the tools.

Space behind the seats was minimal and taken up by the storage area for the batteries. This is also where the Roadster's hood lay when down. (Courtesy Author)

The boot was relatively large by sports car standards, well finished and with easy access to the spare wheel. (Courtesy Author)

Under the bonnet

The engine installation although neat had its problems. With the severe tapering of the front wings, space was limited with items such as the distributor being particularly difficult to access. Also, because of the large engine within a restricted underbonnet area, overheating would occur in some climates.

The overall effect of the superbly presented engine with its twin polished aluminium cam covers with matching carburettor dashpots and the black vitreous enamelled exhaust manifolds was, and still is, a sight to behold – looking as William Lyons intended, as purposeful as it was powerful.

Very early example of the XK120 engine with the tall SU carburettor dashpots and without the extra securing nuts at the front of the cam covers (see later chapter). (Courtesy Author)

Post-launch activity

Everybody and everyone suddenly wanted to own an XK120. Particularly in the US and some other overseas markets, the high rollers seemed determined to be some of the first to get their hands on the car. Film stars, celebrities, those in high society, all saw the XK120 as the epitome of fine motoring in these relatively austere times. As one person in the US put it: 'Society types will be scrambling to get their hands on a car from the Old Country like this, cutting a dashing figure along Sunset Boulevard.' It was all too exciting for some; they were lost for words at the sheer beauty of this wonderful new car.

Many doubted that Jaguar would actually be able to produce it at all, let alone meet the apparent heavy demand for such a car and that, to some extent, was correct. Jaguar intended the XK120 as a showcase for the new engine, to cultivate increased interest in the marque, leading up to the introduction of the Mark VII saloon in two years' time. Lyons and his team anticipated very low production figures for the XK120, possibly to a maximum of a few hundred. Obviously that was one of the few times when William Lyons got his sums wrong!

XK120 and XK100 compared

Engine: XK120
Cylinders: six
Cubic capacity: 3,442cc
Bore and stroke: 83mm x 106mm
Maximum power: 160bhp
Compression ratio: 7:1
Carburettors: Twin SU
Transmission: Four-speed
Overall gear ratios
1st: 12.3:1
2nd: 7.23:1
3rd: 4.98:1
Top: 3.643:1
Suspension
Front: Independent, wishbones, torsion bars, telescopic hydraulic dampers
Rear: Semi-elliptic springs, Girling PV7 lever-arm dampers
Steering: Burman recirculating ball
Brakes: Lockheed hydraulic, 12in drums
Dimensions
Overall length: 14ft 5½in
Wheelbase: 8ft 6in
Track, front: 4ft 3in
Track, rear: 4ft 2in
Width: 5ft 2in
Height: 4ft 4½in
Turning circle: 31ft
Ground clearance: 71/8in
Weight (dry): 2,744lb

Engine: XK100
Cylinders: four
Cubic capacity: 1,995cc
Bore and stroke: 80.5mm x 98mm
Maximum power: 105bhp
Compression ratio: 7:1

Carburettors: Twin SU
Transmission: Four-speed
Overall gear ratios
1st: 13.79:1
2nd: 8.1:1
3rd: 5.59:1
Top: 4.09:1
Suspension
Front: Independent, wishbones, torsion bars, telescopic hydraulic dampers
Rear: Semi-elliptic springs, Girling PV7 lever-arm dampers
Steering: Burman recirculating ball
Brakes: Lockheed hydraulic, 12in drums
Dimensions
Overall length: 14ft 5½in
Wheelbase: 8ft 6in
Track, front: 4ft 3in
Track, rear: 4ft 2in
Width: 5ft 2in
Height: 4ft 4½in
Turning circle: 31ft
Ground clearance: 71/8in
Weight (dry): 2,688lb

The XK on paper

Prior to the public launch of the XK, Jaguar produced a four-page 'Advance Particulars' leaflet on the model containing a drawing of the original design (without bumper bars, based on the original prototype) and a display engine, plus detailed specifications for both the four- and six-cylinder versions.

For a car that Jaguar anticipated building in small numbers it is interesting to review the original 1948 brochure for the new Mark V and XK, almost volumes in their own right. It represented a landmark in brochure design at the time. Not only was it spiral bound, of particularly large size with an embossed stiff cover, but it was printed in no less than four languages and each colour picture was superbly hand-finished and

tipped on to textured board.

The original 'Advance Particulars' leaflet for the XK100 and XK120 using drawings instead of real pictures. (Author's collection)

Surprisingly the XK100 and XK120 both received excellent coverage as the two models were listed with full specifications and prices (the same cost for both cars, remember). The full-page picture of the three-quarter view of the XK120 was apparently hand-finished from a black and white photograph taken at the British Motor Show. Also shown is the brochure picture of *The Motor*'s cutaway drawing of the wonderful XK power unit, which had equal prominence in the brochure alongside the old pushrod unit for the Mark V. Confirming the last-minute approach to the marketing of the XK, the detail pictures of the black car clearly show prototype information like the shaping of the windscreen surround and details of the boot area.

Later a condensed eight-page version of this quality brochure was produced just for the XK120. Much simpler and cheaper, although retaining the large format, this also contained a full page of press comments on the XK120 from all manner of sources, not just the motoring media. Despite the prominence of the XK120, this was the only unique brochure produced for the Roadster, although later simpler brochures were produced for other variants.

It was usual at the time of launch of a new car for the UK motoring magazines in particular to carry major features plus extensive advertising from anyone wishing to be associated with the new model. However, much of this didn't occur for the XK. The Mark V was the apparent new Jaguar at the show and with the late announcement of the XK, little was made of the matter at the time.

Part of the quite extravagant brochure devoted more to the Mark V saloon than the XK but featuring both the four-cylinder and six-cylinder models, even with a price list. (Author's collection)

Obviously hastily prepared drawings for the brochure depict the original 1948 Earls Court Motor Show car with its unique features such as the rear finisher, different windscreen mounts, and the fuel filler inside the boot. (Author's collection)

From every angle the XK120 looked right. Hastily conceived but beautifully executed, it was a tribute to William Lyons and his team. (Courtesy Author)

What the press wrote

The first written report came in *The Autocar* magazine dated 29 October when it called the car the 'Jaguar Speedster'! Many of the myths over the years have been fuelled by media comments, not least its opening caption to the stock picture of the new XK that read: 'A well proportioned body gives the new Jaguar Super Sports two-seater very fine lines. There is a choice of two engines, the four-cylinder being the production version of Lt-Col Goldie Gardner's record engine.' That is something we now know to be untrue.

Of course, there were no road tests or initial reviews, other than information supplied through press releases to the various magazines in the last months of 1948 during and after the British Motor Show. There is no doubt, however, that much praise was to follow *if* Jaguar finally got the car into production and into the hands of owners and road testers. The XK120 was born; now it had to prove itself.

1949–1950
Establishing the title

Perhaps it was inevitable that many people would decry the Jaguar publicity and the name of the car by saying that it would not achieve its supposed performance figures or indeed become a production reality.

Before the release of any production models, therefore, Jaguar took the opportunity to prove its claims. During the following months the XK had been subjected to continued development and testing, closely monitored by chief engineer William Heynes, but it was difficult to establish what the true potential top speed of the car was, other than by mathematical calculation.

It was therefore decided that a car would be taken to Belgium for more extensive speed testing, where it was subsequently found not to be wanting in this department. This convinced Jaguar that it should establish the capabilities of the car through demonstration tests in such a way as to maximise publicity.

The factory's in-house Jaguar Journal was early in its promotion of the exciting new sports car and gave consistent coverage to heighten the enthusiasm of the workforce for the car. (Author's collection)

New production-car speed records

Jaguar chose to demonstrate the XK120's speed at Jabbeke in Belgium, where a new autoroute had been built linking Ostend with Brussels. Still new, hardly used, and straight, it was the ideal venue. The runs were arranged to take place on 30 May 1949. News reporters and media journalists from all the major publications including the Reuters agency were flown out by Jaguar in a chartered plane to witness the event.

Jaguar enlisted the support of the RAC in the UK and Belgium to observe and time the runs and the car (HKV500) was sent over a couple of days in advance in readiness. This XK120 was the second car built (chassis

660002), initially left-hand drive and promoted as a standard production car although it was fitted with an undershield, passenger-side tonneau cover, a special aerodynamic screen, and a 3.27:1 rear axle ratio – all of which were quoted as production options.

Strict regulations were followed with even the fuel in the tank analysed and topped up with standard Shell 75-octane petrol, at which time the tank and fuel lines were sealed. On the morning of 30 May the Belgian authorities closed the highway, the timing gear was set up, and the superbly presented cream XK120 appeared for final scrutineering. The car was driven by Ron 'Soapy' Sutton, then Jaguar's test driver, with support from Wally Hassan and mechanic Jack Lea.

The first unofficial run to warm the car up and check the timing calibrations revealed an incredible 126.22mph, and that was with the hood erect and sidescreens in place! The first two official runs were also made with the hood erect and reached speeds of 125.698mph and 127.253mph, producing a mean figure for the record of 126.448mph The next run was carried out with the hood down, tonneau in position, and with the so-called 'competition' screen. The one-way run achieved 129.388mph with the run back at 131.355mph; afterwards Soapy Sutton commented that he was not happy due to some wheel-spin caused by a freak rain storm at the other end of the road.

A request for a rerun was accepted, at which time the XK120 achieved a one-way figure of 133.388mph. The previous record for a production car, set in 1946, had been 110.8mph. The Jabbeke highway was also famous for the Goldie Gardner International Class E record-breaking run at 176.694mph in his 2.0-litre (Jaguar-powered) EX135 only the year before. Finally, as if to emphasise the docility of the car, Sutton paraded past the spectators at a modest 10mph in top gear!

The full timed results were:

Flying mile with hood erect
First run: 202.290kph/125.698mph
Second run: 204.790kph/127.253mph
Mean speed: 203.490kph/126.448mph
Flying kilometre with hood erect
First run: 202.931kph/126.095mph

Second run: 204.545kph/127.038mph
Mean speed: 203.735kph/126.594mph
Flying mile with hood down
First run: 212.290kph/131.916mph
Second run: 214.490kph/133.283mph
Mean speed: 213.390kph/132.596mph
Flying kilometre with hood down
First run: 211.391kph/131.355mph
Second run: 214.660kph/133.388mph
Mean speed: 213.017kph/132.362mph
Standing start mile with hood down
Mean speed: 139.100kph/86.434mph
Standing start kilometre with hood down
Mean speed: 119.363kph/74.168mph

'Soapy' Sutton at the wheel of the XK120 during the first Jabbeke run in 1949. The spectators are the motoring press flown in especially for the occasion. (Courtesy Jaguar Cars Ltd)

This was an excellent result that created a great deal of good publicity for the car and Jaguar. The record breaking featured in most of the motoring and general press back in the UK and around the world. The story didn't end there because afterwards the same car was driven over the Alps to assess its suitability for the forthcoming Alpine Rally, which turned out to be another success story for the XK120.

Afterwards some production examples of the XK120 Roadster carried a commemorative plaque on the dashboard indicating that they were an 'exact replica' of the record-breaking car – a nice bit of William Lyons's razzmatazz.

Jaguar made the most of its Jabbeke success with this poster, provided to many dealerships around the world, incorporating a stylised drawing of the XK at speed. This image was used many times throughout the life of the car. (Author's collection)

This Jabbeke commemorative plaque was fitted on the dashboard of early XK120s. (Courtesy Author)

Much was made in the media of the early success of the XK120. (Author's collection)

More accolades

Britain reinstated motor racing in 1948 at the ex-aerodrome Silverstone circuit in Northamptonshire and in 1949 the British Racing Drivers Club took over the management of the circuit and instigated the first International Trophy Race in August, sponsored by the *Daily Express* newspaper. In this production car race, supposedly for current production models, Jaguar fielded three XK120s amidst interesting cars as diverse as Allard to Jowett, Lagonda to Fraser Nash, and in which even a pre-war SS100 competed.

For the very first competitive outing for the XK, William Lyons only agreed to enter cars 'if they could win'! Jaguar's service manager F. R. W 'Lofty' England, along with Wally Hassan and public relations man Ernest Rankin, took an XK to the circuit beforehand for significant testing to evaluate the car's potential; the results gave the go-ahead for the race.

Subsequently, three cars were supplied for the race, each privately entered, and in the best British tradition the cars were painted red, white, and blue! The sight of any XK must have been rare at this time so to see three abreast like this, in Union Jack colours, must have looked wonderful.

The cars were: HKV455 (blue), the 1948 Motor Show car, driven by Prince Bira, who was an established and respected racing driver of the day;

HKV500 (white), the Jabbeke car converted to right-hand drive, driven by Leslie Johnson, another established and successful driver who was a friend of Jaguar engineer William Heynes; the red car, an unregistered XK supposedly the first left-hand-drive car (also converted to right-hand-drive for this race), driven by Peter Walker, another well-known driver from this era.

The conversion of the latter two of these cars from left-hand drive was because the majority of corners on European circuits were right-handers, putting left-hand-drive cars at a disadvantage.

From all contemporary accounts it was an exciting race to watch although the Jaguar XKs had it very much to themselves for most of the time. They all lapped the other competitors by halfway through the race, despite an Allard taking the lead at the start. Prince Bira had to retire due to a puncture. Although he attempted to change the wheel off the track (allowed), the jack sank into soft ground, making it impossible. Leslie Johnson also had a near miss when a Jowett crossed his path and caused minor damage.

Nevertheless Leslie Johnson maintained a strong lead, taking the chequered flag after 28 laps, followed closely by his team mate Peter Walker in the red XK. Johnson won his class and the race outright by covering the greatest number of laps in the shortest time, and was presented with the *Daily Express* trophy. This was the second major success for the XK120 and, in particular, HKV500.

No fewer than three coachloads of Jaguar employees turned out for the event – what an incredible morale booster.

Production under way

The first true production cars made it out of the factory by June 1949 – with initial deliveries being taken by customers abroad, of course! The factory records show that a mere 97 cars left the factory that year, 70 per cent of which were left-hand drive. The price originally quoted was £988 plus £275 3s 11d purchase tax, making a total of £1,263 3s 11d on the home market – if you could have found one!

Victorious Jaguar. This wonderfully evocative painting by Tony Smith epitomises the image of the 1949 International Trophy Race at Silverstone. The white XK120, driven by Leslie Johnson, won and Peter Walker, in the red car, came second. The blue XK, driven by Prince Bira, unfortunately didn't finish due to a puncture. (Courtesy Tony Smith)

Early production models at the Foleshill factory dispatch area in 1950. (Author's collection)

More competition successes

After the initial success in the 1949 International Trophy race at Silverstone, Jaguar went on to supply other aluminium-bodied XK120s for drivers to compete with, although strictly as private entries with support from the factory. The cars and drivers were: JWK650 (chassis no 660041), Nick Haines; JWK651 (660040), Leslie Johnson; JWK977 (660042), Peter Walker; JWK988 (660057) Tommy Wisdom; NUB120, Ian Appleyard.

The red car from Silverstone was then taken to the US by Leslie Johnson to compete in the Sports Car Clubs of America races at Palm Beach, finishing fourth overall and second in its class.

Too many races (and successes) followed during the XK120's reign to cover them all here. In 1950 these early alloy-bodied cars competed on numerous occasions with mixed success, although they were a source of concern to other competitors. These XK120s certainly proved their worth, achieving some very good finishes both at home and abroad. The first outright overseas win for the XK120 was in the hands of Alfonso Mena in the Limited Production Car Race run by the National Car Club of Cuba in February 1950.

At the 1949 British Motor Show, again in London, the Jaguar XK120 got even more attention, the stand thronged with visitors eager to see the car. (Courtesy Jaguar Daimler Heritage Trust)

The rare optional 'white' steering wheel for the XK models. (Courtesy Author)

The most significant race in which the XKs were to compete in 1950, however, was the Le Mans 24-hour race in France. Of the above cars, JWK650, JWK651, and JWK77 were entered driven by Haines, Johnson, and Peter Whitehead. Back-up support from the factory was provided by way of car preparation and the services of 'Lofty' England as the team manager.

The cars were pretty standard, except for the addition of a larger fuel tank and improved brakes on steel wheels. (Wire wheels were not an option for the car at this point.) Bumpers were removed for lightness, as were the windscreens, bucket seats were fitted, and straps on the bonnets were added.

The famous alloy-bodied XK120, NUB120, owned by Jaguar but campaigned by Ian Appleyard with outstanding success in the 1950s. (Courtesy Tom Wood)

Patina of age on the interior of NUB120, the most famous of rally XK120s. Now owned by the Jaguar Daimler Heritage Trust, the Roadster still incorporates all its original rally equipment. (Courtesy Tom Wood)

The famous XK120 alloy-bodied Roadster. Despite its handcrafted build, this high-mileage ex-rally example is still in its original, unrestored, state – a tribute to the car and the people who built it. (Courtesy Tom Wood)

Ian Appleyard, with his wife Pat as navigator, on the way to a win in the 1950 Alpine Rally driving Jaguar's alloy-bodied XK120. (Courtesy The Autocar magazine)

It was a tremendous first Le Mans for the XKs with Leslie Johnson at one point holding second place and averaging over 90mph. With instructions from his pit to push on because he was gaining on the leading car, he was set for some success. However, after a total of 21 hours, he had to retire unceremoniously with clutch failure. The other two XKs both finished the race in 12th and 15th positions. There was a great sense of pride in competing at Le Mans and the results were good enough to convince Jaguar and William Lyons that it was quite possible to win with a suitably modified XK. Bring on 1951!

Other successes came in rallying, as one of the other cars mentioned above (NUB120) driven by Ian Appleyard, was to compete initially in the Tulip Rally, where it came second. However, it was in the July 1950 Alpine Rally that Appleyard was to show the true brilliance of his driving and the capabilities of the car. This was a gruelling event of some 2,000 miles that Appleyard knew well and had previously campaigned with an SS100 (LNW100). His navigator/co-driver was none other than William Lyons's daughter Pat (whom Appleyard later married).

The XK120 proved its worth in these very different circumstances and, despite hitting a wall and losing a gear ratio, he set the fastest time over a flying kilometre at 109.9mph, won the acceleration and braking test, got the Over 3,000cc Class win, and an Alpine cup – for a penalty-free run.

A year had passed since the inaugural Production Car Race at Silverstone and in August 1950 it was run again, but now as two separate races due to the large number of entries. In the Over 3,000cc Class five XKs competed; as well as Leslie Johnson and Peter Walker there were Tommy Wisdom, Tony Rolt, and initially the great Tazio Nuvolari. The now famous white XK (HKV500) was prepared for him and specially repainted in red for the occasion. Unfortunately, due to ill health, he was unable to compete and so Peter Whitehead took the wheel of this car.

Just some of the publicity lavished upon Jaguar and the XK120 after the Alpine Rally success in 1950. (Author's collection)

The Walker and Rolt Jaguars took the lead from the start and won the race. Whitehead was in third place for a while but retired with a damaged engine, while Wisdom achieved success along with Johnson. It was another race dominated by the XK120, resulting in first, second, fourth, and fifth places, plus the team prize.

The following month (September) saw the first of the Ulster Tourist Trophy Races at Dundrod take place after a 12-year gap. The XK field was made up of a young Stirling Moss (his first time out for Jaguar in Tommy Wisdom's JWK988), plus Peter Whitehead and Leslie Johnson.

The race started in torrential rain with Leslie Johnson first away but by the second lap Moss was ahead and built up a steadily increasing lead right to the end of the race. Peter Whitehead came in second as Johnson had experienced mechanical problems. Moss won the race and also achieved the fastest lap at 77.61mph, a great tribute to the young Stirling – the new kid on the block. Jaguar won the team prize and Moss was to become established as a Jaguar team driver.

A very different type of event for the XK120 was the traditional concours, examples being run at various venues, sometimes before or after rallies and races. In this case it was Cannes in 1950 and I wonder if the lady got more attention than the car! (Courtesy Jaguar Daimler Heritage Trust)

The great Italian driver Tazio Nuvolari at the wheel of an XK120 (HKV500), although he didn't race. Alongside is a rather dapper-looking William Lyons. (Author's collection)

A young Stirling Moss in a borrowed XK120 winning the first postwar Ulster Tourist Trophy Race, here seen lapping an MG TD. (Courtesy The Autocar magazine)

Endurance at Montlhéry

After the earlier Jabbeke exercise, in October 1950 Jaguar took an XK120 to the Montlhéry circuit near Paris to run an officially observed and timed demonstration run. Leslie Johnson's white XK was used, driven by him and Stirling Moss, the object being to run for 24 hours at 100mph. The actual run covered 2,579 miles at an average speed of 107.46mph and in the last hour they achieved 112.4mph, with a fastest lap of 126.2mph. This was a wonderful achievement for a car that had already covered 4,000 miles in races up to that time.

The competing team for the successful Montlhéry endurance marathon in 1950: 'Dunlop Mac' (in white overalls near screen) with Leslie Johnson, Stirling Moss, and team manager Desmond Scannell to the right. (Courtesy The Motor magazine)

Flavour of the month: the XK gets its just deserts in publicity for another record set in 1950. (Author's collection)

More motor show accolades

In October 1950 the XK120 appeared at the London Motor Show for the

third time, now with more prominence. However, despite its fantastic launch success and the slow drip-feed of cars to the public, the XK was slightly overshadowed by the final launch of the Mark VII saloon – the car for which the XK engine and new chassis were destined primarily.

The accolades for the XK120 continued. In its annual report on the British motor industry, *The Times* newspaper reported: 'The Jaguar XK120 has deservedly become one of the most widely discussed cars in the world. Its attraction is not confined to the racing car speed of which it is capable but is also derived from its docility, which enables it to be driven like any normal car, and its price, which is much below that charged for any other comparable sports car… Production is now running at 80 cars a week and is still rising. Providing a higher performance than any other car in the world, this remarkably British car obviously has a great future before it.'

Making the most of the publicity as the XK is promoted for the 1950 British Motor Show (although the colour picture was taken at the New York Motor Show). (Author's collection)

By 1950 the competition was still trying to establish itself. However, the Aston Martin DB2 finally made it to production and, although it cost £1,915 (around £700 more than the Jaguar), it too enjoyed excellent performance from a twin-cam engine, was attractive in fixed-head fastback style, and was noteworthy for competition and maintenance in having a forward-hinged front end. Jowett now had its Jupiter: handbuilt, with good styling and adequate performance but expensive for what it was at £1,087. Allard increased its range of high performance models at the same price as an XK but without the refinement (or looks) and the Marauder (a three-seater roadster based on a Rover 75) came into being.

What still separated the XK120 from any other car was its complete package: the style, performance, price, and, of course, the name – because Jaguar was now becoming established in its own right.

The 1950 New York Motor Show helped continue the success of the XK120. Jaguar was already at the forefront of car imports into the US; new distributors and dealers were being appointed to cope with the demand,

even if there was little hope of production meeting that demand. Film stars, celebrities, or just those with plenty of cash, were all queuing up to buy the Jaguar but it was still difficult to get one.

Early road tests

The first opportunity for the motor magazines to get their hands on the XK120 came at the end of 1949 when *The Motor* borrowed the ex-show car (HKV455), which was tested by Harold Hastings and Joe Lowrey. They managed to achieve a top speed of over 124mph abroad with the hood and sidescreens in place and a 0–100mph acceleration time of 44.6sec. They were particularly taken aback by the car's stability at speed. The testers commented on the extreme refinement of the car and the fact that most motorists could only imagine achieving such performance in a road production car.

Further positive comments concerned the ease of driving, the car's ride and comfort levels. However, they did levy criticisms at the XK. The steering wheel rake was too sharp, the clutch pedal travel too great, and the seats provided little lateral support. Moreover the good old Moss gearbox came in for little praise. They also thought the lighting poor for such a high performance car.

It wasn't until 14 April 1950 that *The Autocar* magazine published its full road test of an XK120 (JWK675, the first steel-bodied car). It is worth pointing out the uniqueness of the XK120 at this time: the road tester reported that on several occasions he had had to indicate to young boy onlookers that this was not a racing car!

The test waxed lyrical about the car almost to the point of poetry: 'It has a power-to-weight ratio which gives it the heels of any car produced in series; better than 122 b.h.p. per ton is an extraordinary figure for a production car… Nothing like the XK120, and at its price, has been previously achieved – a car of tremendous performance and yet displaying the flexibility, and even the silkiness and smoothness of a mild-mannered saloon…

'During a test of some 700 miles, at the beginning of which it was brand new and by no means run-in, it necessarily received some merciless treatment, but showed no sign of losing tune, used very little oil and did not at any time record above 80 deg C water temperature…

‘Truly this is two cars in one. It can be handled quietly with very little use of the gears if the driver is in a lazy mood. Press the right foot hard down, however, and a different car is revealed. A snarl comes into the exhaust note, though never excessive noise, and on a familiar road the bends and even the landmarks seem to have been redesigned overnight, and placed much closer together than had previously been realised!’

Some of the testers’ comments obviously reflect the period when items such as the gearbox and braking system were the norm – so there was no concern expressed about such matters as the slow synchromesh or brake fade! The test provided a good indication of the top speed flexibility of the car when, on a 1-in-9 hill ascent, incorporating a bend of nearly 90 degrees, the XK scaled this at 40mph in top.

Steel replaces aluminium

The major news about the future of the XK120 came with the realisation that Jaguar had geared up to produce the car in steel in order to meet the demand for the car and ensure its ongoing feasibility.

The last aluminium car produced left the Foleshill factory in May 1950, making a total of 240. The changeover to steel was not without its problems, for although the chassis and mechanical aspects were essentially the same, the body structure was totally re-engineered. Because of this, very few body and trim components were interchangeable between the old and new. Despite this the overall visual differences are few and not that obvious.

For example, there are subtle differences in curvature at certain points such as around the headlamp cowls. The shaping of the under-bumper air vents is different. The rear number-plate mounting is secured from the inside via hidden screws (unlike the alloy cars with external fastenings), and the original style of rear-lamp plinths, made of alloy, were later changed to chrome. The fuel-filler lock was a separate item on the body, with steel cars it was integral in the fuel-filler cover. Perhaps the most prominent external difference is in the fixings of the windscreen surround: the aluminium-bodied cars have a more substantial rubber mounting block at the base on each side than on their steel equivalents. Internally the passenger grab handle is mounted underneath the top rail of the dashboard on the aluminium cars, to the dashboard area itself on the steel models.

Alloy-bodied XK120 (on the left) with the disc wheels and full spats poses with a later steel-bodied car with wire wheels. (Courtesy Author)

Certain aspects of the alloy construction relied on composites of alloy and/or steel and wood. These were replaced with many steel components. Hollow sills are an example of this, as are the door shut faces. The bonnet remained in aluminium, as did the boot lid, although the former was suitably strengthened with a box section at the rear due to a tendency to twist. The rear section was also now entirely of steel construction. The door skins were still of aluminium as well.

Ash framing was also done away with in other areas like the sills, the door hinge posts and, most importantly, the rear bulkhead area around the tonneau panel. The front bulkhead, however, was completely redesigned in steel with space to accommodate a heater unit, an optional extra at the time. The whole structure was still made up of numerous panels welded together, although the front and rear wings did come as complete units. The front wings were pressed in two sections and the headlamp pods were welded into position separately and lead-loaded.

With the steel cars came a new fuel tank suspended above the spare wheel tray area and there was a strengthening cross-member across the back of this area.

These changes brought major advantages. Firstly, it meant production could be carried out on a more mass-produced basis so that more cars would be made, at a more economical cost. Secondly, it would improve the build quality and consistency, which was prone to be a little suspect with the earlier cars. The net result of all this was that by 1950 production had increased dramatically with a total of 1,519 cars being dispatched.

Building the cars in steel had a slight impact on the overall weight of the car, being about 56lb heavier. The first production steel-bodied car (670185) was registered JWK675 and was used by The Autocar in its 1950 road test mentioned previously.

Still at Foleshill

It is often thought that the XK was a product of Jaguar's later move to

Browns Lane. However, the change from aluminium to steel production not only took effect over a short period of time but also when the company was still based at the Foleshill plant. The move to Browns Lane didn't take place until 1952, by which time the fixed-head had been introduced, the Mark VII saloon was in full-scale production, and the racing C-type had been developed.

A celebrity owner's impressions

There was an interesting account of one owner's view of the XK120 in the US *Road & Track* magazine entitled 'My Favourite Sports Car' by one Clark Gable. Some of his comments are worth reproducing in full, as they must have epitomised other owners' thoughts about their new steeds.

'I've always been a bug on cars, especially fast ones. From Duesenbergs to and through hopped-up popular makes. Many were fast but hard to handle on the turns; some lacked the acceleration that one feels should accompany speed; others were uncomfortable, uneasy, cumbersome, or otherwise undesirable from one standpoint or another. The XK has, so far as I've encountered, none of these drawbacks.

'When the XK was first announced, I was driving a Mark IV Jaguar so I already knew what the name implied. The general appearance and specification of the car were enough to make me want it like a child wants candy. I wasn't alone in wanting an XK120 but I was fortunate to be among the early birds in becoming an owner…

'I can and will describe what, to my way of thinking, is a masterpiece of design and construction for a production car… I can say, without reservation, that the car is the easiest handling vehicle I have maneuvered at any speed or conditions.' Praise indeed!

The year 1950 was a truly momentous time for Jaguar and the XK120. There was much more ahead!

Clark Gable, with William Lyons, taking delivery of his XK120 Roadster. (Author's collection)

'Another Jaguar year!', quite rightly proclaimed by the firm in its 1950 advertising. (Author's collection)

The later XK120 engine with the small dashpots on the carburettors. (Courtesy Tom Wood)

A diversity of interests for XK owners from competition of one sort to another, the Brighton concours d'élégance. A regular event in the 1950s, it was a natural for the XK and well-groomed ladies. An interesting XK120 in the middle has a two-tone paint finish. (Courtesy Jaguar Daimler Heritage Trust)

Production changes

In January 1950 a new-style radiator was fitted to the car. This eliminated the facility to use a starting handle to crank the engine over. Therefore this item was removed from the toolkit. Later that year the engine oil sump was standardised with that of the (then new) Mark VII saloon, reducing the oil capacity to 24 pints.

In April that year the SU H6 carburettors were changed to ones with a shorter type of dashpot but it wasn't until the August that pancake-style air cleaners became a standard fitment on the engines.

Specifications: Jaguar XK120 Super Sports

ENGINE

Description

In-line twin overhead camshaft six-cylinder with chromed cast-iron block, aluminium cylinder head. Duplex chain-driven twin overhead camshafts operating valves via bucket tappets. Hemispherical combustion chambers. Aluminium alloy pistons with chromium-plated top rings, EN16 steel connecting rods. Seven-bearing crankshaft with sludge traps

Capacity

3,442cc (210cu in)

Bore and stroke
83mm x 106mm (3.27in x 4.17in)

Compression ratio
7.0:1 (optional 8.0:1)

Maximum power
160bhp (gross) @ 5,200rpm

Maximum torque
195lb ft (264Nm) @ 2,500rpm

Carburettors
Twin SU 1¾in H6

TRANSMISSION
Gearbox
Moss four-speed with synchromesh on top three gears

Ratios
1st: 3.37:1
2nd: 1.98:1
3rd: 1.37:1
Top: 1.00:1
Reverse: 3.37:1

Clutch
Borg & Beck, 10in single dry plate

Propshaft
Hardy Spicer, needle roller bearings

Rear axle
Hypoid bevel. ENV, ratio 3.64:1 (optional 3.27:1, 3.92:1, 4.30:1, 4.56:1)
Salisbury 2HA, ratios 3.77:1, 4.09:1 or 4.27:1

Salisbury 4HA, ratios 3.77:1, 4.09:1 or 4.27:1 (optional 2.93:1, 3.31:1)

BRAKES

Front

Lockheed drum, 12in x 2¼in, two leading shoes

Rear

Lockheed drum, 12in x 2¼in, single leading shoe

Operation

Lockheed hydraulic

Handbrake

'Fly-off' lever with cable linkage to rear drums

SUSPENSION

Front

Independent. Double wishbones, torsion bars, telescopic dampers, anti-roll bar

Rear

Live axle, semi-elliptic springs, Girling lever-arm dampers

STEERING

System type

Burman recirculating ball

Number of turns lock to lock

2.9

Turning circle

31ft 0in (9.45m)

Steering wheel

Bluemel four-spoke, 17in diameter, adjustable for reach

WHEELS AND TYRES

5J x 16in steel disc wheels

Tyres
6.00-16in Dunlop Road Speed cross-ply

PERFORMANCE
The Autocar road test, 14 April 1950

Top speed
126mph (202kph)

Acceleration
0–50mph (80kph): 8.3sec
0–60mph (96kph): 12.0sec
0–70mph (112kph): 15.5sec
0–80mph (128kph): 19.0sec
0–90mph (144kph): 25.9sec
0–100mph (160kph): 35.3sec
Standing quarter mile (402m): Not measured

Fuel consumption
13–17mpg (21.7–16.6l/100km)

DIMENSIONS
Length
14ft 5½in (4,407mm)

Width
5ft 2in (1,575mm)

Height
4ft 4½in (1,334mm)

Wheelbase
8ft 6in (2,591mm)

Track

Front: 4ft 3in (1,295mm)
Rear: 4ft 2in (1,270mm)

Ground clearance
71/8in (181mm)

Weight
2,919lb (1,324kg)

1951
Consolidation and expansion

This was to be an even more momentous year for Jaguar and certainly its best overall in competition terms. Jaguar was awarded the Dewar Trophy by the RAC for the most outstanding engineering and technical achievements during 1951. William Lyons proudly collected the trophy. These significant feats amounted to winning the Tourist Trophy Race at Dundrod, putting up the best performance in the International Rally of Great Britain, placing first, second, third, and fourth in the Silverstone Production Car Race, and breaking the International Class C Record at Montlhéry. Jaguar had also won the Le Mans 24-hour race, made the best performance in the Alpine Trial, and achieved first and second placings in the Tulip Rally. Then there were first, second, third, and fourth placings in the Rallye Soleil, followed by first and second places in the Liège–Rome–Liège, and a win in the first production car race at Spa.

Prices increase

The early success of the XK120 was particularly good for Jaguar's reputation and expansion into export markets. Things, however, were not always to go its way. For example in April 1951, by which time more XKs were available on the home market, the purchase tax structure had changed, increasing the cost of buying a new car considerably. From an initial purchase tax figure for the XK of £275, this was raised to £550, bringing the total UK price to £1,538 7s 9d, a 20 per cent increase.

The RAC awarded Jaguar the Dewar Trophy in 1951 for its engineering achievements.

Tin-top addition

Looking back at Jaguar's early history after the introduction of the SSI and SSII models in the 1930s, it wasn't long before the company expanded its

range of cars to captivate different markets, but with all the cars based on the same mechanicals and, in some cases, trim. Thus the SSI coupé begat the four-light saloon, begat the tourer, the Airline, and the drophead coupé. A similar scenario was to take place with the XK120.

After the initial success of the XK120 open two-seater (or Roadster as we will call it from now on), Jaguar expanded the range by announcing a new fixed-head coupé variant in March 1951 at the very first postwar International Motor Show in Geneva. This was a brilliant move by William Lyons as it offered everything the Roadster had and more, plus proper all-weather protection and saloon car comfort.

In those days producing a range of variants all based on the same structure was much easier than it is today. Once you had a good chassis that was easily adaptable plus the right running gear, it didn't take a lot of development to turn out an additional model. The beauty of the XK120 fixed-head coupé was that it looked right. It certainly didn't give the appearance of a hastily produced car, modified from a Roadster.

By this time the Jaguar Mark VII saloon was in production and the similarity of line between the big four-door car and the XK120 fixed-head were clear to see and all the better for it. Many would say at the time (and still do today) that the style of the fixed-head is superior to the Roadster with its soft flowing curvaceous line to the roof complementing the original XK bodywork. The new car was even more aerodynamic than the open-top car despite a weight increase and the top speed was improved marginally.

There was a touch of déjà vu about the XK120 fixed-head as the one-off SS100 fixed-head displayed at the 1938 British Motor Show showed a similarity of line to the XK. So perhaps a fixed-head XK was always on the cards but was impractical or uneconomic to produce using the original XK aluminium structure.

A new and additional face to the XK120 with the sophisticated fixed-head coupé model; this particular car is the 1952 Montlhéry record-breaking car *(see page 69).* *(Courtesy Tom Wood)*

Another challenge

In March 1951 Leslie Johnson took his old stager, JWK651, back to the Montlhéry circuit in France for another high-speed run. By this time the XK's engine had been tuned to produce 184bhp. The fastest speed he was able to achieve was 134.43mph.

Leslie Johnson with his trusted XK120, this time on the Mille Miglia in 1951, now with a modified full-width aero-style windscreen. (Author's collection)

Although this is the battle-worn 1952 Montlhéry car, still in original condition, it represents the fixed-head model well. The frontal aspect is virtually unchanged from the roadster except for the noticeable higher roofline and different screen treatment. (Courtesy Tom Wood)

The extra height of the fixed-head is shown off well from this rear angle. (Courtesy Tom Wood)

This view shows off the superb lines of the fixed-head to their best advantage. One can see the resemblance in styling to the Mark VII saloon. (Courtesy Tom Wood)

A more civilised XK

In the context of the period and the sports car market then, the fixed-head coupé was still very much a fast, sporting motor car but of a much more civilised nature. It was a far better equipped, more sophisticated model than the Roadster. The coupé had conventional external door handles and locks, glass wind-up windows that could be lowered completely and featured opening front and rear quarterlights. Such 'luxuries' were extremely rare at this time with most sports cars, like the XK120 Roadster, relying on floppy side curtains and having no door locks.

In most respects the bodywork was exactly the same as the Roadster but

now front wing-mounted ventilators were fitted, opened from inside the car, providing good airflow to limit the heat generated in the cockpit. This change in the front wings also applied to Roadsters around the same time (see Production changes on page 64).

The doors were wider for the fixed-heads to allow improved access, which meant subtle changes to the rear wings and other areas. Chromed-on-brass window surrounds, as on the saloons, had a neat slope at the rear giving the car an even more pronounced fastback look. Opening front quarterlights in the window frames provided extra ventilation when required and rear quarterlights also featured, opened via lovely chromed latches (also taken from the Jaguar saloons).

The windscreen surround was now an integral part of the bodywork with the roof, so the screen surrounds were less prominent than with the Roadster but a split windscreen was still used.

Mechanically the fixed-head was very much the same as the Roadster. However, a large tubular air box was situated under the right-hand front wing attached to the carburettors via hoses with an accompanying large pancake air filter positioned between the radiator and the radiator grille.

The fixed-head coupé was the first XK to feature traditional door handles, allowing the doors to be locked for extra security. (Courtesy Tom Wood)

Extra ventilation was accorded occupants of the fixed-head with these neat quarterlights behind the doors. Chromed on brass, the lock mechanism came from the Mark V and VII saloons, also used on other contemporary luxury cars like Bentley. (Courtesy Tom Wood)

A totally different door structure was required for the fixed-head coupé with the swept back window and quarterlight line. (Courtesy Tom Wood)

The coupé's rear window wasn't that large but was better than that in the Roadster. (Courtesy Tom Wood)

An integrated split windscreen with chromed surround added rigidity to the whole structure of the fixed-head. (Courtesy Tom Wood)

The Autocar's cutaway drawing showing the salient parts of the XK120 fixed-head coupé. (Courtesy The Autocar magazine)

Interior appointments

Inside, the fixed-head had a fitted wool headlining, at the rear incorporating saloon-type interior lamps (one per side), taken from the Mark VII saloon parts bin.

Although the seats were essentially the same as those in the Roadster, they had thinner backrests and were less shaped, giving a flatter appearance. Behind the seats there was now a substantial oddments compartment with a shelved area (ideal for umbrellas and maps), the top of which was hinged to provide access to a storage box. With the seat backs folded forward, the whole box area could also be hinged forward to gain access to the two six-volt batteries underneath, as on the Roadster. For the fixed-head coupé, Jaguar fitted steel floors instead of plywood.

A proper headlining, veneered wooden door cappings, and even storage space behind the seats. The box is open to reveal the twin six-volt batteries fitted to the XK120 at this time. (Courtesy Tom Wood)

Quality throughout. Even in this original example, the fixed-head coupé must have been very appealing to those who wanted sports car performance and handling but with the creature comforts of a saloon. (Courtesy Tom Wood)

The more civilised fixed-head now had a pair of Perspex sun visors, and a heater was a standard fitment. The final touch was the fitment of a walnut veneered dashboard with matching door cappings, creating a true saloon car ambience for this ultra-fast two-seater.

Despite the extra air of luxury about the fixed-head compared to the Roadster, the door panels were much plainer and not even upholstered in leather but in Rexine. There were no door pockets but instead there was a full-width moquette kick panel at the bottom.

The facia incorporated a new layout of switches and dials, again much of it taken from the Mark VII parts bin. There was now even a lockable glovebox on the passenger side for those important little items you wanted to hide from general view, while in the centre of the dashboard top there was a proper ashtray. In the centre lower section of the facia there was a well-finished veneered sliding drawer with baize interior. If a period radio (then a costly £47 extra) was fitted to the car this replaced the drawer.

Door panel treatment was relatively simple at this stage, except for the wood cappings, and sports car owners were virtually unique in an XK in having wind-up windows! The bolt was an added feature for this record-breaking car to secure the doors closed when running on the high speed banking (see text.). (Courtesy Tom Wood)

This is what the normal owner would have looked at when he bought a new XK120 fixed-head coupé. Best walnut veneer, full instrumentation, cigar lighter, and even a neat baize-lined drawer for oddments. Most of the instrumentation came from the contemporary Mark VII saloon. (Courtesy Tom Wood)

Although this interior isn't quite standard because of the extra timing equipment for the record runs, it is representative of the beautifully crafted interior of the fixed-head model. (Courtesy Tom Wood)

A different market

The fixed-head coupé was very well received and captivated a different market for the XK. It offered a very civilised type of fast motoring; indeed it could be regarded as one of the first true Grand Touring models, providing all the performance of the Roadster with the comfort standard of a luxury saloon. The penalty was that the fixed-head weighed in at an extra 168lb compared to the Roadster.

Americans loved features like the 'genuine walnut veneer' and were often told by the salesmen (to some extent quite correctly) that every car was unique and that the veneer on *their* car could not be replicated!

The price of the new fixed-head coupé model at launch was £1,140 before purchase tax, a mere £10 dearer than the equivalent Roadster model. On the UK market this translated into £1,616.

The XK120 fixed-head coupé in its standard form with disc wheels, full spats, and extra cost Ace Rimbellishers. The style looks even better with the spats fitted; the flow of line from the original Roadster is maintained but emphasised even more by the 'tin top'. (Courtesy Author)

Performance enhancements

After the launch of the fixed-head and coinciding with its success at Le Mans that year with the new C-types, Jaguar issued a service bulletin *Tuning Modification on XK120 Cars for Competition Purposes*, providing details of ways to improve the XK's overall performance. Unlike a conventional service bulletin issued to distributors and garages, this one was more public orientated to the point that *The Autocar* magazine actually reproduced much of it in a 1951 publication. The sort of things available included the fitment of high compression pistons (brought about by the availability of higher octane fuels by this time), camshafts giving 3/8in lift

to inlet and exhaust valves, and different needles for the SU carburettors.

A twin-pipe exhaust system with straight through silencer made by Burgess was also available, although this required a different passage underneath the car and reduced the ground clearance somewhat.

Other recommendations included a revised crankshaft damper, lighter flywheel for improved standing-start performance and low gear acceleration, and a new clutch. For the suspension there were stiffer front torsion bars and seven-leaf rear springs providing a 20 per cent increase in roll stiffness. A choice of rear axle ratios was also available.

The type of aero screens available for competition drivers. Note the cowling for the rear-view mirror. (Courtesy Author)

A covered copper finisher, normally painted in the body colour, was fitted to the rear wheelarch flange area when wire wheels were specified. (Courtesy Tom Wood)

Appreciating that many owners would also race their cars competitively, a number of other options were available. Brooklands-style racing screens with body cowls and even a cowling for the rear-view mirror could be fitted. There was also a metal tonneau cover for the passenger's seat area and lightweight bucket seating.

No modifications were listed for the braking system, which was somewhat surprising. To improve brake efficiency, the service bulletin suggested the removal of the rear wheel spats and wheel trims and even fitting air scoops to the rear brakes. Another improvement could be the fitting of harder brake linings.

Wire wheels, however, finally became an option. Of Rudge Whitworth manufacture with 54 spokes, they retained the same 16in x 5in size as the steel equivalents. Where wire wheels were fitted, either at the factory in the case of a new car or afterwards by the owner, the rear wheel spats had to be removed. If this option was specified when a car was ordered, Jaguar removed the spats and fitted hollow copper beading around the exposed

flanges of the rear wheelarches as a finisher. Some companies and individuals carried out modifications to the spats to enable them still to be fitted, with a cut-out to allow the hub spinner to show proud.

The same service bulletin gave an indication of the performance that could be achieved with some of the above modifications. When the high-lift camshafts were fitted, along with 8:1 compression pistons and the twin-pipe exhaust system, the power output would be raised to 181bhp (against 160bhp for the original production car). There would also be an increase in the maximum revs available from 5,400rpm to 5,800rpm.

Other minor suggested changes included the removal of the thermostat for a more direct flow of coolant and a manual switch for the auxiliary starting carburettor. Different axle ratios were now available from 3.27:1 through 3.64:1, 3.92:1, and 4.3:1. The highest ratio (3.27:1) was stated as only suitable for high-speed circuits with straight sections of a minimum of three miles in length! This ratio provided a top speed of 145mph.

What the performance equipment cost

High-lift camshafts (per set): £15 0s 0d
High compression 9:1 pistons (per set): £3 10s 0d
Replacement distributor: £6 10s 0d
Lightened flywheel: £7 10s 0d
Replacement clutch: £9 12s 0d
Dual exhaust system: £15 0s 0d
Stiffened road springs and torsion bars (each): £4 0s 0d
M14 brake shoes (per set): £13 18s 3d
Bucket seats (each): £7 10s 0d
Racing aero screens (each): £7 10s 0d

The Special Equipment model

There was now even an SE (Special Equipment) model of the XK120 that could be ordered complete from the factory. These models automatically incorporated the high-lift camshafts, the special crankshaft damper, lightened flywheel, 8:1 compression ratio pistons, twin exhaust system, stiffer road springs, and wire wheels in body colour. SE models could be specified for both the Roadster and fixed-head coupé although soon after the announcement Jaguar dictated that only a single exhaust system would

be provided on fixed-head models.

The additional cost (without tax) for an SE model was a mere £115 for the Roadster or £105 for the fixed-head although these prices were reduced twice over the period of production, making them very attractive and popular in the US.

As it was thought that most SE buyers would use their cars in competition, Jaguar supplied the Roadsters with the cowlings and aero screens packed in the boot, to be fitted by the owner when and as necessary. This idea was later dropped and only made available by special request, as many were not being used but sold on the open market by their owners.

An extensive road test

In April 1951 *Motor Sport* magazine got its hands on an XK120 Roadster for an extensive road test, for the first time since the car had been introduced. Editor William Boddy did not seem over- impressed with the XK120 at first. His actual comments were: 'I was embarrassed to discover the great distance my throttle foot had to travel to encounter the brake pedal and a bit put out at the way the Jaguar wallowed and howled its Dunlops when deflected from the straight ahead – you have to be used to sailing small boats to master this chap, I thought.'

However, he soon got to grips with the car and went on to comment that he found the throttle response and brakes stimulating and the engine devoid of any temperament. 'The way we left everything behind will long live in my memory.'

His praise throughout the report was immense except for one spirited drive when he ran out of brakes due to severe brake fade, a problem many contemporary XK120 owners already knew about. He also had an issue with the fuel consumption dropping to a low 13mpg at one point but then complimented Jaguar on the docility of the car when appropriate and the fact that it had an incredible turning circle, befitting a London taxi!

Minor grumbles included a draught on the driver's feet, the irritation of the opposing movements of the speedometer and rev counter needles, the poor direction indicators, the lack of reasonable fuel range, and not being able to identify whether or not the sidelamps were illuminated. He also noted a few rattles throughout the car on test.

Overall this test was highly complimentary and Boddy's closing remarks

said it all. ‘By the high quality of its finish and appointments alone the XK120 represents very good value for money. Its very liberal speed and acceleration, accomplished with such willing ease, are unrivalled and to drive this Jaguar is to enjoy an experience at once unique and embracing one of the highest pinnacles of modern motoring.’

Opinions of the XK in America

In contrast the following month Road & Track magazine in the USA enlisted the opinions of American drivers of the XK120. The subjective results covered criticisms such as the lack of low speed torque in comparison to a big-block US car, the near-vertical steering wheel position and protruding horn push, and the ‘awkward’ gear change with long travel preventing ‘snappy’ changes. There was also a criticism of the ‘awkward’ appearance of the car with the hood erect and the fact that it leaked!

Another criticism levied by one driver was that the bodywork and paint finish on the test car was not of ‘the usual Jaguar quality’ and that the metallic paint seen on most examples in the US was ‘not very attractive by American standards’. An issue often commented upon related to the thin bumper bars that didn’t provide adequate protection.

In all there were relatively few faults and immense praise was given to the car’s performance and apparent handling capabilities.

In this test *Road & Track* determined the true top speed of its XK120 in view of comments in the press expressing concerns at claimed figures. After a 5,000 mile service and tune up, the magazine used a standard car with the rear wheel spats removed and the full windscreen replaced by the aero screen. The result was an average of 121.6mph with a standard 3.54:1 rear axle ratio. The test was carried out at an elevation of 3,000ft and with two people in the car at the time.

Optional extras

With the model now well established Jaguar issued a comprehensive optional extras list for the XK120:
Lucas matching fog and spot lamps
Shaped suitcases for the boot
Luggage rack for attachment to the boot lid
Choice of radios with installation kits

Petrol pump condenser
Electric clock condenser
Auxiliary fuel tank with bracketry and extra fuel pump
Engine shield undertray
Aero screens and rear-view mirror cowling
Bucket seats
External mounting bracketry for spare wheel on boot lid
Dunlop racing tyres
Heater unit (before standardisation)
Alternative axle ratios
C-type cylinder head with exhaust manifolds
Twin SU H8 2in carburettors with adapted inlet manifold
Close ratio gearbox (1st 2.98:1, 2nd 1.74:1, 3rd 1.21:1)
High compression 9:1 pistons
Wire wheels
Dual exhaust system
Lightened flywheel
Stiffer torsion bars
Extra leaf rear road springs
M14 brake shoes
Louvred bonnet

Typical of period accessories were these Ace Rimbellishers, a standard fitment on the saloon model of the time. (Author's collection)

Availability of the C-type cylinder head for the XK120 provided a useful boost in performance. (Courtesy Author)

Another British testimonial

Early in 1952 renowned motoring journalist Laurence Pomeroy reviewed his ‘drives’ in 1951, covering a wide variety of models from an 8-litre Bentley to Jowett Jupiter and, of course, Jaguar XK120. His eloquent words are worth reproducing.

‘My lasting impression of the Jaguar XK120 which, by the kindness of the makers, I was able to use for some weeks, is that it is pre-eminently an excellent and very high-performance two seater touring car… Even after some long acquaintance one continues to be awed by the length of the bonnet and reminded of the man who said that the worst thing about his dachshund was that when he fed it in the dining room he had to go into the kitchen to see if it was pleased.

‘Similarly, on the Jaguar I felt that I was placed too far from the accident and that a moderate change in angle on a bend resulted in very large lateral displacement of the nose of the car. This impression was heightened by the exceedingly low seating position from which one looks along the bonnet instead of looking down on top of it… I did not learn how good these really were until I, by accident, arrived on a corner far sharper than it looked and found to my surprise that by turning the wheel fairly smartly the car took me round with little ado.

‘The luggage compartment was far greater than I thought at first, but the hood has not been designed to cope with the English climate. If working single-handed, one would get so wet in the time taken to put it up that one might really just as well rely upon natural draught to carry the rain over the top of the screen without stopping the car. With the hood up, backward visibility is almost nil and this, coupled with the absence of direction indicators, puts London traffic driving into category H.’

The XK120 in competition

Early in 1951 Jaguar entered two XK120s into the Italian Mille Miglia race with Leslie Johnson and Stirling Moss driving. Unfortunately both cars crashed early on so didn’t finish.

The Moss car (HKV500) was repaired and sent off to the Spa circuit for the Belgian National Production Car Race, this time driven by bandleader Johnny Claes, where he scored outright success. With this result came a request from the Belgian Jaguar importer, Madame Joska Bourgeois, to supply a car for Claes to drive on the Marathon de la Route Rally. He was invited to take HKV500 along with navigator Jacques Ickx (father of famous Formula 1driver Jackie Ickx). They completed this Liège–Rome–Liège rally with zero penalty points, another great success for the XK.

In May 1951 the Boreham aerodrome hosted the West Essex Car Club

meeting, during which there was a Jaguar Challenge Race, especially for XK120s. This was an early example of the private club races that would blossom for a number of years, be resurrected in the late 1970s and then again in the 1990s, and are still popular today.

The first International Rally of Great Britain, organised by the RAC, took place on 4–9 June 1951. From the start in Brighton on the south coast the rally took in the whole country as far north as Grantown on Spey, then back down the west coast to finish in Bournemouth with some very arduous tests. In the Scottish Highlands, for example, cars were being driven along the equivalent of a dry dusty riverbed followed by a high-speed half-hour trial at Silverstone, where many drivers failed to average the set speeds.

Among the 267 entries was Ian Appleyard in his XK120 (NUB120); he not only won his class but also made the best performance in the whole rally. Another XK120 driven by Miss Newton took the ladies' prize.

The gruelling route of the first International Rally of Great Britain. Ian Appleyard in NUB120 achieved a class win and best performance. (Courtesy Author)

The actual LT2 lightweight XK120 built for Le Mans but which didn't compete. It is now safely in the hands of Chris Jaques, here competing in a modern Jaguar Enthusiasts' Club XK race. (Courtesy Author)

LT2's unique body with different bonnet pressing. (Courtesy Author)

For the prestigious Le Mans race in 1951 Jaguar prepared three lightweight XK120s (known as LT1, LT2, and LT3) alongside the development of the proper racegoing C-type model. Although the chassis for these cars were pretty standard, the bodies were made from one-piece aluminium but still taking the general design of the XK. Instant differences included the lack of a boot lid, doors finishing at the sill line, the rear wings moulded differently, no provisions for a top, conventional screens, and a

smaller bonnet (separate grille) and louvres. Although prepared for Le Mans, none of these special XKs competed, as the C-types were ready in time. One of these XK specials survives today in the hands of Jaguar Enthusiasts' Club member and racing competitor Chris Jaques.

Although the C-types were a direct development from the XK120 and, of course, won that 1951 Le Mans race, space does not permit going into the development and successes of these models. As is common knowledge among Jaguar enthusiasts, the C-types and later D-types were incredibly successful for Jaguar, and might never have been without the XK120.

In August Jaguar returned to Silverstone for the Production Car Race with no fewer than 11 XK120s competing. Stirling Moss won that race with other XKs taking second, fourth, and fifth places in the Over 3,000cc Class and gaining the team prize. Returning to the same venue in September for the RAC Tourist Trophy Race, Jaguar swept the board, winning the trophy and team prize and the distance award.

We must not forget the famous Alpine Rally that Ian Appleyard made his own. After success in previous years he was back again in 1951, partnered by his wife Pat in NUB120. Although a smaller field of 65 cars competed, a mere 28 completed the Rally and Appleyard took first place in his class, achieving another Coupe des Alpes with no points lost on the whole event. Other XK120s came third, fourth, fifth, and sixth in the Over 3,000cc Class.

The XK120s dominated the racing scene in 1951, its most successful year in competition with too many entries and awards to cover here.

Production changes

It was in February 1951 that Jaguar fitted the front wing air ventilators to all models to improve cockpit air flow. Operation from inside the car was by levers at either side of the footwells. The ventilators were fitted with gauze to prevent the ingress of insects and other large debris into the car. At the same time the Roadster's hood was lengthened with a modified hood frame and the rear screen was made to unzip to improve ventilation without putting the top down.

Surprisingly, it wasn't until March 1951 that 54-spoke wire wheels were offered as an optional extra for the XK120. Initially they were only obtainable to match the body colour of the car. At the same time Italian Borrani wire wheels were made available in the US for customers. With

wire wheels it was no longer possible to fit the rear wheel spats so, where wire wheels were stipulated from new, Jaguar removed the spats and their fasteners and fitted a D-section rolled brass tube as a finisher to the outside edge of the rear wheelarches.

It was not easy to fit a cockpit heater to the very early XK120 but this was rectified when changes were made to the scuttle area and a Smiths heater was made available as an optional extra (standard on the fixed-heads). Later in 1951 the heater become a standard fitment even on the Roadster models.

By the end of 1951 Salisbury 2HA and 4HA rear axles were used alongside the existing ENV type with a variety of ratios.

The front wing ventilators, added to improve airflow inside the cockpit to offset the heat generated from the engine and transmission. (Courtesy Tom Wood)

A later model XK120 Roadster with hood erect and sidescreens fitted compared with the fixed-head coupé, which was a much more attractive proposition in poor weather conditions. (Courtesy Tom Wood)

What the XK120 cost in April–July 1951

XK120 Roadster

Basic: £998
Purchase tax: £550 7s 9d
Total in UK: £1,538 7s 9d

XK120 fixed-head coupé

Basic: £1,088
Purchase tax: £605 18s 11d
Total in UK: £1,693 18s 11d

SE versions cost an extra £115 on the basic price, or almost £180 more when British purchase tax was added.

Revised colour schemes

Exterior: Cream/Old English White
Roadster Interior: Biscuit with Red
Fixed-head coupé Interior: Red
Hood (soft-top): Fawn
Exterior: Pastel Green (metallic)
Roadster Interior: Suede Green
Fixed-head coupé Interior: Suede Green
Hood (soft-top): Fawn
Exterior: Suede Green
Roadster Interior: Suede Green
Fixed-head coupé Interior: Suede Green
Hood (soft-top): French Grey
Exterior: Pastel Blue (metallic)
Roadster Interior: Light/Dark Blue
Fixed-head coupé Interior: Light Blue

Hood (soft-top): French Grey
Exterior: Bronze
Roadster Interior: Biscuit with Tan
Fixed-head coupé Interior: Tan
Hood (soft-top): Fawn
Exterior: Red
Roadster Interior: Biscuit with Red
Fixed-head coupé Interior: Red
Hood (soft-top): Fawn or Black
Exterior: Birch Grey
Roadster Interior: Biscuit with Red
Fixed-head coupé Interior: Red
Hood (soft-top): French Grey
Exterior: Silver
Roadster Interior: Red
Fixed-head coupé Interior: Red
Hood (soft-top): Fawn or Black
Exterior: Silver
Roadster Interior: Light/Dark Blue
Fixed-head coupé Interior: Light Blue
Hood (soft-top): Fawn or Black
Exterior: Black
Roadster Interior: Biscuit with Red
Fixed-head coupé Interior: Red
Hood (soft-top): Black or Sand

Quick-release fuel filler on the Montlhéry car. (Courtesy Tom Wood)

XK production in 1951
XK120 Roadsters: 1,114
XK120 fixed-head coupés: 212
Total: 1,326

Over 60 per cent of production was of left-hand-drive examples.

Rather sombre launch brochure for the XK120 fixed-head coupé. (Author's collection)

There was also a Special Equipment brochure that depicted only the Roadster. The four-page sepia-toned item contained a specification on the back. (Author's collection)

Jaguar did issue some attractive black and white pictures in the form of a portfolio for its whole range, like this fixed-head example. (Courtesy Jaguar Cars Ltd)

Mid-term XKs on paper

Apart from that initial brochure (shared with the Mark V saloon), the need wasn't there for high-powered promotion material like expensive literature. Hence the only XK120 Roadster brochure available later was a revamp of the content from the earlier literature. Jaguar never attempted to upgrade it.

With the announcement of the fixed-head coupé, Jaguar did produce a new brochure – but this was a simple four-page item, with spot colour, only depicting the new model. The factory did a similar thing with the Special Equipment model but that catalogue didn't even feature the fixed-head.

However, there was quite a bit of lavish publicity through advertising in the main motoring magazines.

Strong Jaguar advertising for all its models featured in the contemporary magazines The Autocar and The Motor. (Author's collection)

End of year tribute

After yet another successful British Motor Show in 1951, the Institute of British Carriage and Automobile Manufacturers awarded Jaguar and the XK120 fixed-head coupé first prize in Section 10 of its awards.

The end of 1951 and, with the support of an additional model and more power, the XK120 was doing well, was still exceptionally competitive in motor sport, and enjoying buoyant sales. What next?

A range brochure produced in the early 1950s showed all the cars with specifications and used hand-tinted colour versions of the black and white photographs, which looked particularly attractive! (Author's collection)

1952–1954
More and less XK120

The year brought a mixed bag of good and bad for the British car industry. In one direction the covenant scheme preventing the resale of cars had virtually disappeared but in another area hire purchase restrictions were instigated. These required a minimum deposit of 33½ per cent of the purchase price of a car, with the remainder to be paid off in a maximum of 18 months. On top of this fuel costs rose with the budget, as did the road fund licence for larger cars. It was also still very difficult to get hold of a new car in the UK because of continued restrictions to ensure exports were maximised.

While all this was happening, of course, Jaguar was moving its entire operation from the old First World War ex-shell factory at Foleshill to the former Second World War 'shadow' factory (at that time utilised primarily by Daimler) two miles down the road on Browns Lane, Allesley. The move took the form of an organised shift by department and wasn't completed until the end of 1952.

The French Montlhéry circuit was hard on cars and to run an XK120 on such a marathon over 10,000 miles inevitably caused problems. However, it was a huge success and boosted Jaguar's reputation no end. (Courtesy Jaguar Cars Ltd)

Production changes

In April all Jaguar engines had extra studs fitted to the front of the engine cam covers to eliminate oil leaks from that area and self-adjusting front brakes were introduced. The rear axles were changed from the original ENV manufacture to Salisbury in June. The standard axle ratio then became 3.54:1, like the drophead coupé, although other ratios were still available upon request.

Jaguar prices go up

Price rises for all Jaguar models were announced in May 1952 and the new structure for the XK120 range was:

Roadster
- Basic: £1,130
- Purchase tax: £629 5s 7d
- Total in UK: £1,759 5s 7d

Fixed-head coupé
- Basic: £1,140
- Purchase tax: £634 16s 8d
- Total in UK: £1,774 16s 8d

Special Equipment models extra
- Basic: £115
- Purchase tax: £64 0s 9d
- Total in UK: £179 0s 9d

Record-breaking run at Montlhéry

In August 1952 Jaguar achieved a public relations coup when it took an XK120 fixed-head coupé to France for an endurance run. The car, registered LWK707, was the second right-hand-drive fixed-head coupé built (and the car featured in these pages) and was modified for the purpose at the Jaguar factory in Coventry. The alterations included the fitting of a long-distance 24-gallon fuel tank, a larger 2¼-gallon engine oil sump, a multi-branch twin-pipe exhaust system, and a 3.27:1 rear axle ratio. Other equipment added was a Pye radio transmitter and receiver, additional lighting, and an extra windscreen wiper. Other more standard modifications included the fitting of high-lift camshafts and wire wheels.

The drivers for this marathon at the Montlhéry track, near Paris, were Leslie Johnson (of Jabbeke fame), Stirling Moss, Jack Fairman, and Bert Hadley. Back-up was provided by suppliers such as Shell (oil and fuel), Dunlop (tyres), and SU (carburettors and tuning), with the support of the British Racing Drivers' Club.

The run started at 4pm on Monday 4 August with Jack Fairman at the wheel for the first stint. However, within 12 hours a rear tyre shredded, resulting in damage to the rear wing and the battery cable, and necessitating

a stop for repairs.

The marathon car as it is today, still in original condition. Inside the boot is the extra fuel tank and the catch tank for oil. (Courtesy Tom Wood)

The run recommenced at the same time the following day and for the next two days the car ran superbly with stops every four hours for refuelling and driver changes. Over the period the tyres had to be replaced at between 1,000 and 2,000 miles dependent on wear. The car was averaging between 105 and 110mph at this stage without problems, the fastest lap being achieved by Stirling Moss at 121.28mph. At 4pm on the Friday afternoon the car had broken its first World Record – 72 hours at an average speed of 105.55mph.

At 2am that morning the Jaguar had also broken the Class C record for 10,000 kilometres, in 57hr 54min at an average speed of 107.031mph, beating the previous record of 104.7mph by a French Delahaye.

After a short break for oil changes and generally checking the car, it was off again maintaining a good average speed in order to break further records. The next record to fall was the Class C for four days and then the 15,000 kilometre landmark in the same category. However, part way through the car suffered a broken rear spring in spite of which the drivers continued motoring to attain their records. The irony here is that when these results were achieved, the car made a pit stop for the road spring to be replaced. Because the replacement spring had not been carried on the car as a spare part, any further record attempts would not be validated.

However, the team decided to continue with the run in order to obtain the ultimate accolade even if it would not be verified. On Tuesday 12 August at 4pm the seven days' and seven nights' run was completed, having covered a total of 16,851.73 miles in 168 hours at an average speed of 100.31mph.

The record run coming to an end at Montlhéry, an incredible feat with no major breakdowns. (Courtesy Jaguar Cars Ltd)

After the marathon the XK120 fixed-head returned to England and participated in the 1952 British Motor Show at Earls Court. (Author's collection)

The records achieved by this XK120 fixed-head coupé were:
10,000 kilometres, International Class C: 107.51mph
Three days, World Record: 105.55mph
Three days, International Class C: 105.55mph
15,000 kilometres, World Record: 101.95mph
15,000 kilometres, International Class C: 101.95mph
Four days, World Record: 101.17mph
Four days, International Class C: 101.17mph
10,000 miles, World Record: 100.66mph
10,000 miles, International Class C: 100.66mph

The car subsequently returned to the UK and received a civic welcome in Dover. The technical editor of *The Motor* was given the chance of driving the car back to London. The car then returned to Coventry and was used for publicity purposes. The car is still in the hands of the Jaguar Daimler Heritage Trust, much of it as original as the day it finished the record-breaking runs.

After the run, Jaguar produced this album with a compendium of black and white photographs taken during the event and signed by all involved. Copies are worth a considerable amount of money today. (Author's collection)

The record-breaker created enormous excitement and enthusiasm through the media, with many advertisers taking advantage of the opportunity to promote their products alongside the successful Jaguar. The children's press got in on the act as The Eagle comic shows, also promoting Stirling Moss, who at the time was campaigning his own fixed-head coupé. (Author's collection)

The actual Stirling Moss car (depicted in The Eagle comic) was always painted two-tone. Here it is seen on the Daily Express Rally in Wales in 1952 with The Autocar's sports editor, John Cooper, as navigator.

The ex-Stirling Moss XK120 fixed-head coupé at a 1980s Jaguar rally after restoration. The car still exists today. (Courtesy The Autocar magazine)

Yet more competition successes

It was in 1952 that the Scottish Ecurie Ecosse team was established by David Murray and three young XK120 owners: Bill Dobson, Ian Stewart, and Sir James Scott-Douglas. The cars were painted in the Scottish Saltire blue colour, becoming the trademark of the team for many years. Its first big result came at the British Empire Trophy race on the Isle of Man. Sir James Scott-Douglas won the Over 3,000cc Class and came sixth overall. In June one of its XKs achieved a third place at Rheims behind Stirling Moss, then in one of the relatively new C-types.

Ian Appleyard again competed in the 1952 Alpine Rally, continuing his success in this event. Out of 95 starters only 23 survived and he won the Alpine Cup, becoming the first person ever to be presented with a gold cup for three consecutive Alpine wins (1950, 1951, and 1952), all in NUB120.

In 1952 the first International Goodwood meeting organised by the BARC took place with several XK120s competing in the Easter Handicap race. Among well-known names competing was Stirling Moss; others drivers included Staffordshire born-and-bred J. B. Swift. The six-lap First Easter Handicap race was quite exciting with a field of XKs and included

Geoff Duke (of motorcycle fame) driving an Aston Martin DB3. A good start was made by driver Russell in an XK but it was E. W. Holt who came in first, followed by J. B. Swift in another XK. Duke and his Aston were third and Moss came in fourth in another XK.

This was the last year in which Stirling Moss would compete in an XK120 at the International Trophy meeting in May, when he won.

The Ian Appleyard XK120 was finally retired in 1953 after an exemplary career and still survives today. In the passenger seat is his wife Pat, daughter of William Lyons. (Courtesy Jaguar Cars Ltd)

Even after four years, the incredible success of the XK120 was still felt as some of these contemporary advertisements show. (Author's collection)

Typical of privateers with their XK120s racing throughout the 1950s: Jimmy Swift from Stoke-on-Trent with his mechanic, Ernie Johnson, 'on loan' from the local Jaguar dealership. (Courtesy Jaguar Cars Ltd)

Many private owners raced their XK120s. This is a Club 8 meeting at Silverstone in June 1951 with a numerous XK entry. (Courtesy The Autocar magazine)

Autumn improvements

In September 1952 the front wings were modified to take a new style of integrated sidelamp housing to replace the chromed housings previously bolted in place. The new housings were lead-loaded into the wings during pressing and assembly and painted to body colour. A nice touch was the fitment on top of the lamp unit of a red plastic telltale, which illuminated when the sidelamps were on and provided a good point of reference when aiming the car.

A month later the fuel gauge changed, eliminating the facility (and the operating button) to show the sump oil level. Other switchgear was upgraded and, with the standardisation of a heater, a rheostat control was used. At the same time demister vents were added to the scuttle on the Roadster models and windscreen washers were fitted as standard equipment with a glass reservoir provided under the bonnet. The system was operated by vacuum via a button on the dashboard.

In October Jaguar deleted the availability of metallic paint finishes for all XK models and the steel road wheels for all cars were increased in rim size from 5in to 5½in.

By the end of the year the stiffer rear springs, initially available on the Special Equipment models or as part of a performance package, were standardised on all models.

The new style of sidelamp housing incorporating a red telltale, making it possible to see from the driver's seat if a bulb was out. (Courtesy Tom Wood)

An early unrestored left-hand drive XK120 dashboard. Note the Jabbeke commemorative plaque on the right-hand side. (Courtesy Author)

Increased 1952 production

By the end of the year production for the Roadster had increased by virtually 50 per cent and fixed-head production was catching up. Figures for the year were:
Roadsters: 1,658
Fixed-head coupés: 1,318
Total: 2,976

First road test of the fixed-head

October 1952 saw the first road test of the fixed-head, with the British magazine *The Autocar*. The writer likened it to a racehorse: …extremely powerful yet very willing and docile but on the other hand it must be controlled and treated with respect if the best results are to be obtained'. The report went on: 'The outstanding impression after having driven this car for more than 2,000 miles is of the way it goes, and keeps on going. Even after a high speed Continental journey, and also a complete road test on a Belgian motor road, the car had no feeling of tiredness; nor was there any noticeable falling off in its sprightliness.'

Again one must take these contemporary tests in the context of the time. For example, the tester stated that the gearbox synchromesh was very effective and couldn't easily be beaten! I doubt a current journalist would say the same for the old Moss gearbox!

The main criticism was one of the driving position and the arrangement of the foot-operated controls. The narrowness of the car and the reduced height of the fixed-head made it difficult to adopt the ideal driving position – for a long journey and for a tall driver. It was stated particularly that more support was needed for the driver's leg muscles and that, because the brake pedal was positioned higher than the accelerator, there was an extraordinary length of travel to move the leg from one to the other – 'heel-and-toeing' was therefore very difficult.

The comments about the interior were subdued: '…simple but tastefully trimmed in leather and polished wood, a combination that results in a very pleasing appearance…' Surprisingly little was made of the fact that this was in essence still a very fast two-seater sports car. It was rare to find such a combination on the market at that time, particularly at such a price.

A critical American test

Morris B. Carroll Jnr tested the XK120 Roadster for the American *Speed Age* magazine in December 1952, stating that at the price of $4,039 it offered more dependable miles per hour per dollar than any other car in the world. He took the car for a turn around the then new 1.5-mile road course at Thompson, Connecticut – apparently typical of the shorter circuits then in the US. He felt that the car couldn't be as competitive as smaller, lesser-powered sports cars but that on the open road there would be nothing to beat it.

Moving on to another location where maximum speeds could be achieved and making two runs in each direction, he managed to obtain an average of 126.47mph with a best single run of exactly 127mph. The best 0–60mph acceleration time he achieved was 8.8sec. He admitted to finding the brakes somewhat lacking, taking 171ft 6in to stop the car from 60mph, while a Ferrari he tested managed this in only 135ft.

Regarding the ride he found it hard by American standards and on cobbles at 30mph 'downright uncomfortable'. Over 50mph on the average tarmac road, however, it was more comfortable than anything else he had ever driven.

He commented on overheating in traffic and that this was apparently a common complaint from owners in certain parts of the US. He said it was impossible to drive across Manhattan in the summer without reaching boiling point and couldn't understand why Jaguar had not done anything to rectify this problem since 1949! He also criticised the windscreen wipers, the cable being difficult to access and making for problematic repairs. He also maintained that the average life of the distributor points was only 500 miles and gave the impression that the heater had been designed 'by someone who wintered in Florida!'.

Overall however he rated the car's performance, appearance, road ability, and dependability as excellent; availability of service, economy, and utility was thought good but weather protection only fair.

More rally triumphs in 1953

Ian Appleyard won the RAC International Rally in March 1953 losing no marks at all and other Jaguars dominated the results, giving them the team prize as well. NUB120 was finally retired in 1953 and has been retained by

Jaguar ever since. It is now in the hands of the Jaguar Daimler Heritage Trust. In its heyday there was even a model kit of the car produced by Scale Model Equipment. It cost £1 4s 6d and depicted NUB in its steel-wheeled state complete with rear spats. The 1/32-scale kit could be assembled in less than three hours with just scissors, small pliers, a file, and a penknife plus paint and glue.

In 1953 Ian Appleyard returned to the Alpine Rally in his new steed, a steel-bodied XK120 Roadster, registered RUB120. He won his class and yet again was rewarded with another Alpine Cup. Two other XK120 drivers came second and third. This car, RUB120, was later rebodied into a drophead coupé with extra space to accommodate occasional seating in the rear. This was done in an attempt to meet regulations that might have allowed him to compete and perhaps win the coveted European Rally Championship. In the end RUB120 didn't compete and was eventually broken up.

A record at Jabbeke

Jaguar returned to Jabbeke in Belgium in April 1953 to carry out last-minute testing of a revised C-type for the Le Mans race that year. The Jaguar engineers also took along an XK120 Roadster, registered MDU524, the same car that had run in the 1952 Alpine Rally driven by Gatsonides. The XK, with Jaguar's chief test driver (Norman Dewis) at the wheel, achieved an incredible 140.789mph over the flying mile and 141.789mph over the flying kilometre.

The XK120 that at Jabbeke in April 1953 achieved another record for the model, a speed of 140.789mph. (Courtesy Jaguar Cars Ltd)

The Jabbeke XK120 was used for publicity after the 1953 record runs. Here it is in Leamington Spa. (Courtesy Bauer Automotive/Classic Cars Magazine)

Late addition drophead coupé

Two years after the introduction of the fixed-head coupé, Jaguar announced a third variant to the XK line, the drophead coupé. Launched in March 1953 for the New York Motor Show, this 'last of the line' model was, in many respects, the most practical because it provided the best of both worlds – Roadster and fixed-head. It also clearly proved the success of the original design and its adaptability for a further model, still utilising the basic structure.

The principle of the Roadster was that it provided rakish sports car wind-in-the-hair motoring, while the fixed-head was more of a grand touring model with comfort and refinement for longer journeys. The new drophead combined the two themes in one, very successful, car.

The car was still essentially a Roadster in that it had a fold-down hood but there were several significant differences. Firstly, the hood design when erect was far more pleasing in shape and style and was made of mohair. The rear screen was still very small and, like the Roadster's, it could be unzipped and opened for a good flow of air if the occupants didn't want the hood down. An entirely new (fixed) split front windscreen and surround was fitted to the body with the hood fastened to it by three over-centre catches. Most importantly, the hood could be disconnected from the screen and lowered in seconds without the driver having to get out of his seat! When down, two hooks secured the hood against lift from the wind and the soft-top could be raised in seconds when a change in weather or a need to leave the car secure arose.

The last, and many would say the best, variant of the XK120 was the drophead coupé, providing the benefits of soft-top motoring with the comforts of a hardtop. (Courtesy Tom Wood)

Although not so different at the rear from a Roadster, the drophead's hood sat more comfortably. (Courtesy Tom Wood)

A revised boot area was necessary for the drophead coupé. (Courtesy Tom Wood)

The drophead's split windscreen is the same style as that used on the fixed-head coupé model. (Courtesy Tom Wood)

The zip-down rear window arrangement for the drophead coupé. (Courtesy Tom Wood)

The drophead coupé's rear window with chrome surround and the extra detail of chrome finishers above and below made for a quality look to the whole hood area. (Courtesy Tom Wood)

The hood couldn't retract completely into the body but sat on a shelf at the rear and a fitted cover was provided to keep the hood clean and neat when folded down. To accommodate this new arrangement the fuel filler and fuel tank had to be altered.

The drophead was a well-finished model with a full-width chrome finisher along the edge of the hood where it met the top of the screen and similar brightwork finishers along the sides of the hood and along the back above the rear screen. There were even chrome strips along the extreme edge of the body where it met the hood when closed.

Elsewhere the drophead was very much the equal of the fixed-head in that it retained the larger aluminium doors, external door locks, front quarterlights, and wind-down glass windows. However, instead of the fixed chromium-plated window frames, the frames on the drophead were integral with the glass and could be wound down into the doors, completely out of the way.

The later drophead coupés all had the built-in sidelamp units. The frontal view is little different to the Roadster except for the screen surround. (Courtesy Tom Wood)

The drophead's window frame is naturally different to the fixed-head model, as is the quarterlight with its flatter top. (Courtesy Tom Wood)

Although the erect hood of the drophead coupé has a more pleasing line than the Roadster, rear-quarter visibility is poor. (Courtesy Tom Wood)

The luxurious finish of the interior of the drophead coupé echoed that of the fixed-head. (Courtesy Tom Wood)

The flatter seat back arrangement of this later drophead. (Courtesy Tom Wood)

A neat trimmed box provided good storage facilities with the top up or down. (Courtesy Tom Wood)

A well fitted headlining was a real benefit for convertible owners and certainly not the norm on sports cars. (Courtesy Tom Wood)

Although the drophead's door panels look the same as the fixed-head they are different, incorporating a map pocket. (Courtesy Tom Wood)

Internally the hood was particularly well finished with a fitted lining that

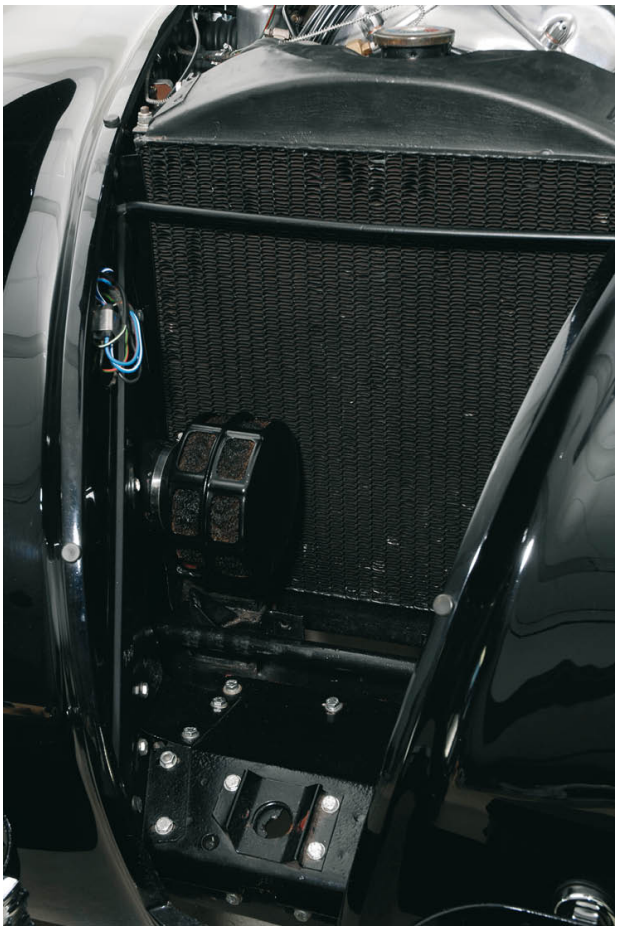
even incorporated a courtesy light. Like the fixed-head, the drophead enjoyed the walnut veneer dashboard and door cappings and the heater as standard equipment. The door trims incorporated pockets again (in a different style from the Roadster), something that was lacking in the fixed-heads. Surprisingly, sun visors were not fitted to the drophead coupés.

Mechanically the drophead coupé was identical to the other models except for the fact that it was slightly heavier than the fixed-head and with a higher rear axle ratio of 3.54:1.

Only available through 1953 and into 1954 (the first six months' production was built for export), the drophead coupé is the rarest of the XK120 breed, a late comer that was very well received at the time, however. For a modest £20 increase over a fixed-head model and £30 over a Roadster, it made good sense to buy a drophead. An SE version was also available (with the single-pipe exhaust system).

A full complement of instruments for the drophead coupé followed the line of the fixed-head and Mark VII saloon. (Courtesy Tom Wood)

This oddments storage drawer could be removed to allow the fitment of a radio. (Courtesy Tom Wood)



The unusual air cleaner position on the XK120 drophead coupé models. (Courtesy Tom Wood)

Well-finished dash top with neat rear-view mirror and an ashtray! (Courtesy Tom Wood)

No lavish publicity material for the last of the XK120s, just a simple four-page spot-colour leaflet and then they called it a Convertible, not a drophead coupé. (Author's collection)

What the XK120 cost in 1953

Roadster

Basic: £1,130

Purchase tax: £471 19 s 2d

Total in UK: £1,601 19s 2d

Roadster SE

Basic: £1,245

Purchase tax: £519 17s 0d

Total in UK: £1,764 17s 0d

Fixed-head coupé

Basic: £1,140

Purchase tax: £476 2s 6d

Total in UK: £1,616 2s 6d

Fixed-head coupé SE

Basic: £1,245

Purchase tax: £519 17s 0d

Total in UK: £1,764 17s 0d

Drophead coupé

Basic: £1,160

Purchase tax: £484 9s 2d

Total in UK: £1,644 9s 2d

Drophead coupé SE

Basic: £1,265

Purchase tax: £528 3s 8d

Total in UK: £1,793 3s 8d

Factory picture of the XK120 drophead coupé obviously ready for export to the US, hence the whitewall tyres (still with protection on them) and the unusual position of the front number plate. (Courtesy Jaguar Cars Ltd)

This factory picture shows an early drophead coupé. (Author's collection)

The first motor show for the new drophead coupé model alongside the award-winning C-type sports/racing model. (Courtesy Jaguar Daimler Heritage Trust)

The XK120 and its competitors in 1953

Throughout 1952 and 1953 British manufacturers got to grips with the important sports car market, particularly with exports in mind. New exciting cars were starting to threaten the XK's stronghold, particularly in

the US.

Make and Model: AC Ace
Top speed: 103mph
0-60mph: 11.4sec
Standing ¼-mile: 18.0sec
Fuel consumption: 23mpg
Price inc tax: £1,297
Make and Model: Aston Martin DB2/4
Top speed: 111mph
0-60mph: 12.6sec
Standing ¼-mile: 18.9sec
Fuel consumption: 20mpg
Price inc tax: £2,622
Make and Model: Austin-Healey 100
Top speed: 107mph
0-60mph: 11.2sec
Standing ¼-mile: 18.5sec
Fuel consumption: 22mpg
Price inc tax: £1,064
Make and Model: Bristol 403
Top speed: 97mph
0-60mph: 15.1sec
Standing ¼-mile: 19.9sec
Fuel consumption: 20mpg
Price inc tax: £2,976
Make and Model: Jaguar XK120 Roadster
Top speed: 126mph
0-60mph: 10.0sec
Standing ¼-mile: 17.0sec
Fuel consumption: 15mpg
Price inc tax: £1,602
Make and Model: Jensen Interceptor
Top speed: 95mph
0-60mph: 13.1sec
Standing ¼-mile: 19.0sec

Fuel consumption: 19mpg
Price inc tax: £2,409

Make and Model: MG TD
Top speed: 73mph
0-60mph: 23.9sec
Standing ¼-mile: 23.4sec
Fuel consumption: 25mpg
Price inc tax: £826

Make and Model: Porsche 356
Top speed: 87mph
0-60mph: 17.0sec
Standing ¼-mile: 20.1sec
Fuel consumption: 30mpg
Price inc tax: £1,842

Make and Model: Sunbeam Alpine
Top speed: 95mph
0-60mph: 18.9sec
Standing ¼-mile: 21.1sec
Fuel consumption: 23mpg
Price inc tax: £1,269

Make and Model: Triumph TR2
Top speed: 105mph
0-60mph: 11.9sec
Standing ¼-mile: 18.7sec
Fuel consumption: 28mpg
Price inc tax: £787

The competitive edge of the Jaguar was dwindling, particularly with entirely new models like the Jensen Interceptor, and although other models like the new Austin-Healey and Sunbeam Alpine were not strictly in the same class, they vied for the ever important US dollar. The Austin-Healey, AC, Jensen, and TR were all very exciting and different to the XK120, now over five years old!

Competition in the lucrative sports car sector of the market was growing in the mid-1950s. (Author's collection)

Road tests in America

In 1953 *Road & Track* magazine in the US carried out a road test of an owner's (David Mitchell's) XK120M fixed-head coupé that had covered over 4,000 miles. The test included interesting comments from a feminine perspective that are worth repeating: '…the Jaguar poses an amusing paradox. American women – for whom today's 'mobile living room' cars are allegedly designed – seem, the least able (of the two sexes) to withstand the appeal of the British hardtop. Performance-wise the XK120 is a man's car in the truest sense, yet its concours design and its feminine appeal result in a veritable 'jewel box on a sports car chassis'.

The car in question was apparently finished in 'crushed strawberry' paintwork with chromed wheels and had had Mitchell 'mufflers' (silencers) fitted, which somewhat quietened down the exhaust note and provided better ground clearance than the two-pipe system Jaguar fitted. On test *Road & Track* reiterated previous comments and confirmed the performance at the Jabbeke speed trial by suggesting that the car had a dual personality. An extremely quick and responsive car providing 'more performance than you will ever need' and, at the same time, was able to be a lazy driver's car, tootling along at a mere 15mph in top gear and only using second to start from traffic lights. The magazine managed to achieve a slightly better figure than *Auto Speed* magazine at 8.5sec for the 0–60 mph acceleration time and obtained over 15mpg in the process; the best one-way maximum speed was only 123.3mph.

Concerning the aspects of performance from the modified model, the testers commented on the stiffer torsion bars and rear springs that provided a more positive ride. They also made the point that although the stiffer suspension had its adverse effects on poor road surfaces at speeds below 25mph, once above this speed the ride was arguably better than a softer-sprung car.

In another test of the fixed-head M model, which at the time cost $4,460 including wire wheels, *Auto Sport Review* magazine published a rumour

that Jaguar was contemplating quietening the exhaust note as it might deter some buyers of the cars. Its road tester, Barney Clark, felt the opposite: 'It is an utterly distinctive sound – hard, taut, competent; the voice of a really potent high-performance sports car… even at 30 miles per hour in high gear – rings "General Quarters" for every cop in the Western Hemisphere. Tickets you are bound to get – but it is worth it.'

Barney appreciated the fixed-head as, during the test, the weather was atrocious. He emphasised the virtues of such a car, combining sports characteristics with home comforts. However, in desperate winds he felt the chill coming through the side ventilators and crossing the pedal area!

The XK120 fixed-head coupé M model then cost an extra $395, the extra made up by wire wheels, twin exhaust system, and engine modifications producing an extra 20bhp. Under acceleration tests *Auto Sport* found the car somewhat wanting until the testers discovered that the throttle was only opening 75 per cent and the fuel mixture was too lean. Ideal, as they said, for pottering around the boulevards but not for serious competition work.

XK120s were raced in the US too. Al Keller poses with the winning fixed-head coupé that he drove in the 100-mile race at Linden Airport, New Jersey in June 1954. (Courtesy Getty Images)

The performance figures achieved were not the best due to the wet road conditions but show a good improvement over a standard XK120: 0–50mph in 8sec, 0–90mph in 24.7sec, standing quarter mile in 17.5sec, 30–50mph in 7.2 seconds, and top speed 120.2mph.

Auto Sport Review cited the usual criticisms of the steering wheel/column position and the pronounced horn button but otherwise had nothing but praise for the car. 'A driver's car with instant response, good acceleration and road holding yet still a car Mamma! could take to the supermarket.' Isn't that the way all Jaguar sports cars have been since?

All the road testers were most impressed with the interior and the appointments – so unusual for a car of this type at the time.

Production changes

In the spring of 1953 wire wheels were available in a variety of finishes, not

only body colour but also stove-enamelled silver, chrome-plated or chromed spokes and platinum-finished rims. A choice was also available of either 54-spoke or 60-spoke for extra strength.

Towards the end of 1953 the drophead coupé was fitted with steel-skinned doors instead of aluminium, although still using wooden frames, and all the open models received the flatter seat backs that had been a feature of the fixed-head up to this time.

Lower American prices

By September 1953 Jaguar had reduced the prices of the XK range for the US market:
XK120 Roadster: $3,345 (17% reduction)
XK120 fixed-head: $3,875 (over 4.5% reduction)
XK120 drophead: $3,975 (6.5% reduction)
The reduction on the drophead coupé is surprising as it was a relatively new model at the time. The Roadster figure is perhaps understandable as the drophead was bound to take away some sales. Perhaps the main reason for the changes were the recent successes achieved by other British sports car manufacturers and the fact that Jaguar must have already been planning its replacement XK model.

Back to Jabbeke yet again

The April high-speed run fuelled the possibility of another return to Jabbeke later in the year and, with the decision taken at the last minute, it was conceived as a great media exercise in readiness for the 1953 British Motor Show. So XK120 MDU524 was suitably modified for the return.

The work involved smoothing out the bodywork and sealing off the brake air ducts in the front wings and part of the radiator. The sidelamps and headlamps were removed, as were the bumper bars and screens. A metal tonneau cover was fitted over the passenger side and the driver's door had an extension piece to prevent air entering the cockpit. A Perspex dome was screwed down over the driver to help aerodynamics and the rear spats remained fitted to improve airflow.

Internally the cockpit was stripped out for lightness and a much smaller steering wheel fitted.

No details were released about the mechanics but in view of the fact that

the then experimental replacement for the C-type was there at the same time, it would seem logical that the XK120 carried a similar high performance power unit along with a higher 2.92:1 rear axle ratio.

The results of the run were far beyond the wildest dreams of what Jaguar could have expected as driver Norman Dewis (Jaguar's chief test driver) achieved the incredible speed of 172.412mph.

On the same occasion Jaguar's Antwerp dealer turned up with his own 'tuned' XK120 Roadster, putting that through the speed traps. It also achieved an astonishing speed of 154mph!

The XK120 at Jabbeke again late in 1953, when it achieved the ultimate for the model and Jaguar – 172mph! (Courtesy Jaguar Cars Ltd)

A complete replica of the 1953 Jabbeke car was produced by XK specialist Guy Broad a few years ago as a tribute. It was taken back to the highway in Belgium to commemorate 50 years since the run. (Courtesy Author)

Record sales in 1953

With a 12 per cent sales increase, 1953 proved the best year ever for the XK120 range. Although sales of both the Roadster (25 per cent down on 1952) and fixed-head (35 per cent fewer than 1952) were decreasing, the deficit was more than made up by the new drophead variant.

Roadster: 1,260
Fixed-head coupé: 868
Drophead coupé: 1,251
Total: 3,379

Production changes in 1954

By 1954 2in SU carburettors were offered as an additional cost item and the Salisbury 4HA axle with a 3.54 to 1 axle ratio was standardised for all cars. Dashboard layout was also amended during this last year of XK120 production, the ammeter and fuel gauges swapping places. The panel lights also got a rheostat adjustment and there was a new lighting switch, although

still different on the Roadsters from other models.

In June 1954 the domed horn push in the centre of the Bluemel steering wheel was finally removed and replaced with the flat type as seen on the later Jaguar saloons and subsequently on all XKs. The dashboard switchgear again changed during this period.

Cheaper SE versions

In January Jaguar reduced the prices of the SE models:
Roadster and fixed-head coupé: £1,694 0s 10d (including purchase tax)
Drophead coupé: £1,744 7s 6d (including purchase tax)

Autosport enjoys the drophead coupé

In 1954 John Bolster of *Autosport* magazine got his hands on a drophead coupé model and one of his early comments was that, with the hood erect, it was the best looking Jaguar that had yet been made. He went on: 'The head is padded and lined, and the operating mechanism is completely concealed. Compared to the open car, the whole interior is more luxuriously appointed and the walnut dashboard, with large, round instruments, is a joy to behold.' He also passed comment on the beautifully made body, free from wind noise and rattles. In contrast to comments from road testers about the improved visibility of the fixed-head model, the drophead suffered, like the Roadster, from blind rear quarters and a very small rear window.

Bolster heaped praise on the drophead in many ways, recommending that owners should enjoy the car, as it is 'one of the finest high speed touring cars ever made. The suspension gives a far smoother ride than the lighter type of sports car can provide and the effortless half throttle cruising speed of 100mph is a real pleasure.' He added that it was a practical car for everyday use on business or pleasure, and the lady of the house could take it to the shops!

Production in 1954

The 1954 production total only fell back marginally from the previous year. That is remarkable considering that production stopped mid-stream during the year but may also have been because of the price reductions mentioned earlier. Roadster production shot up dramatically, which may have had something to do with bodyshells left in the factory. It is also now known

that many cars remained unsold until after the introduction of the replacement XK140 model.
Roadsters: 1,966
Fixed-head coupés: 282
Drophead coupés: 515
Total: 2,763

Total XK120 production

Roadsters (open two-seater): 7,614
Fixed-head coupés: 2,678
Drophead coupés: 1,767
Total: 12,059

XK120 production ceased in 1954 to make way for its replacement, the XK140, discussed in the next chapter. Fixed-head production was stopped in July with the other models following between August and September. Of the 12,059 cars built, 9,096 examples were sold in the US, illustrating just how important the model was to Jaguar and in bringing in vital currency for Britain.

The XK120 had proved its worth. Not just a fast and stylish sports car to be seen in, nearly all the cars sold worked for their living, either in competition or as very practical everyday transport. The XK120 set the standards postwar.

Later XK120 colour schemes

Exterior: Old English White
Interior Roadster: Biscuit/Red
Interior Fixed-head: Red
Interior Drophead: Red
Hood: Fawn
Exterior: Old English White
Interior Roadster: Biscuit/Red
Interior Fixed-head: Red
Interior Drophead: Pale Blue
Hood: Black
Exterior: Birch Grey

Interior Roadster: Biscuit/Red
Interior Fixed-head: Red
Interior Drophead: Red
Hood: French Grey
Exterior: Birch Grey
Interior Roadster: Biscuit/Red
Interior Fixed-head: Red
Interior Drophead: Grey
Hood: Black
Exterior: Birch Grey
Interior Roadster: Biscuit/Red
Interior Fixed-head: Red
Interior Drophead: Light Blue
Hood: Black
Exterior: Birch Grey
Interior Roadster: Biscuit/Red
Interior Fixed-head: Red
Interior Drophead: Dark Blue
Hood: Black
Exterior: Black
Interior Roadster: Biscuit/Red
Interior Fixed-head: Red
Interior Drophead: Red
Hood: Black
Exterior: Black
Interior Roadster: Red
Interior Fixed-head: Grey
Interior Drophead: Grey
Hood: Black
Exterior: Black
Interior Roadster: Interior Roadster: Red
Interior Fixed-head: Biscuit
Interior Drophead: Biscuit
Hood: Black
Exterior: Suede Green
Interior Roadster: Suede Green

Interior Fixed-head: Suede Green
Interior Drophead: Suede Green
Hood: French Grey
Exterior: Suede Green
Interior Roadster: Suede Green
Interior Fixed-head: Suede Green
Interior Drophead: Suede Green
Hood: Black
Exterior: Pastel Green
Interior Roadster: Suede Green
Interior Fixed-head: Suede Green
Interior Drophead: Suede Green
Hood: Fawn
Exterior: Pastel Green
Interior Roadster: Suede Green
Interior Fixed-head: Suede Green
Interior Drophead: Grey
Hood: Black
Exterior: British Racing Green
Interior Roadster: Tan
Interior Fixed-head: Tan
Interior Drophead: Tan
Hood: Gunmetal
Exterior: British Racing Green
Interior Roadster: Suede Green
Interior Fixed-head: Suede Green
Interior Drophead: Suede Green
Hood: Black
Exterior: Red
Interior Roadster: Biscuit/Red
Interior Fixed-head: Red
Interior Drophead: Red
Hood: Black
Exterior: Red
Interior Roadster: Biscuit/Red
Interior Fixed-head: Red

Interior Drophead: Red
Hood: Fawn
Exterior: Pastel Blue
Interior Roadster: Light/Dark Blue
Interior Fixed-head: Light Blue
Interior Drophead: Light Blue
Hood: French Grey
Exterior: Pastel Blue
Interior Roadster: Light/Dark Blue
Interior Fixed-head: Dark Blue
Interior Drophead: Dark Blue
Hood: Black
Exterior: Pastel Blue
Interior Roadster: Light/Dark Blue
Interior Fixed-head: Dark Blue
Interior Drophead: Dark Blue
Hood: Dark Blue
Exterior: Mediterranean Blue
Interior Roadster: Blue
Interior Fixed-head: Blue
Interior Drophead: Blue
Hood: Black
Exterior: Mediterranean Blue
Interior Roadster: Blue
Interior Fixed-head: Blue
Interior Drophead: Blue
Hood: French Grey

This rather special XK120 Roadster was ordered by an American buyer. Finished in Old English White, the car had all exterior trim, including the wire wheels, gold plated. Nothing appears to be known of the car now. (Courtesy Jaguar Daimler Heritage Trust)

Bob Berry in his XK120 leads the C-type of C. G. H. F. Dunham during an Aintree International race meeting in the mid-1950s. (Courtesy Bauer Automotive/Classic Cars Magazine)

JAGUAR XK140
1954–1957

(Courtesy Tom Wood)

1954–1957
Extra power, more space

Up to the mid-1950s British sports cars ruled the world and were a major money earner for the UK. Marques like Jaguar, along with MG and Triumph and even smaller manufacturers such as AC and Austin-Healey, were a tremendous success, particularly in the US where British manufacturers had created this market. However, by this time things were changing with not only very competent new British sports cars coming on to the market but also an aggressive approach to sales and marketing by German manufacturers with cars from Mercedes-Benz and Porsche. Even the Americans themselves were getting in on the act with hastily produced so-called sports car equivalents. British exports were also forced down by dock strikes in the UK. Was everything turning against our producers and their cars? Certainly in 1955 MG was displaced as the biggest importer of cars into the US, by Volkswagen, with Jaguar taking third place.

Jaguar's US promotion

In 1955 Jaguar hit back against the increased competition with two-page advertisements relating to a major test carried out on the XK engine by the American Ethyl Corporation. It put an XK power unit through a series of tests at the Detroit Research Laboratories to show that the engine had a relatively low octane level requirement.

Another good move for Jaguar proved to be a poll conducted by *Popular Mechanics* in the US. This voted Jaguar the world's most representative sports car, followed by Porsche, MG, Ferrari, Austin-Healey and Mercedes-Benz, Triumph, and then Aston Martin. The American Ford Thunderbird and Chevrolet Corvette came well down the list at 15th and 19th respectively.

The XK is dead, long live the XK

The XK120 had done its job in establishing Jaguar as a prominent sports car producer. The car was unequalled in its time but like most cars it had its

faults and with competition looming it was inevitable that changes would be needed to retain its competitiveness and to satisfy the increasing expectations of prospective buyers.

From archive pictures it appears that Jaguar intended to replace the XK120 with an entirely new car. Although undoubtedly based on the same engine and gearbox, the proposed replacement would have been of more contemporary design and might even have benefited from monocoque construction, as Jaguar was already working on the small 2.4-litre saloon at this time. Mock-ups were produced in both open and closed forms so the design must have had serious consideration, although it was finally abandoned and little information beyond the pictures is actually known.

The most likely reasons why the new project came to nothing lie in the time and cost in development of the new compact saloon (released in 1955), which would inevitably sell in larger quantities than a sports car and introduce Jaguar to another new market in which to sell its cars.

Still in need of a new sports car, Jaguar therefore opted for a revamp of the XK120 design, retaining the essence of the original car by using essentially the same mechanical parts, chassis, and even, in many cases, the same body pressings.

The ‘new’ model was designated XK140, which seems an enigma in itself as there was no logical reason why it should not have been called XK130, other than for the concepts mentioned above which never went into production anyway!

The XK140 was effectively a more refined version of the old model that was launched at the Earls Court Motor Show in October 1954 in all three variants – Roadster, fixed-head coupé and drophead coupé.

A concept for a completely new replacement for the XK120. Although much more futuristic in its design, it would have taken too long to bring to production when the factory was working towards the introduction of the compact 2.4-litre saloon. (Courtesy Jaguar Cars Ltd)

At the prototype stage for the XK140: offering up the cast radiator grille against the original 120-style one. For some reason the wings don't have sidelamp pods and the lower sidelamps (that would eventually be indicators) are of a different type. Also, the door/rear quarterlight frames are not right. (Courtesy Jaguar Daimler Heritage Trust)

At this prototype stage the shape of the rear window isn't quite right, nor are the rear lamps. Jaguar obviously considered the fitment of a full-width bumper at this stage as well, with the number plate mounting going on to the boot. (Courtesy Jaguar Daimler Heritage Trust)

A change of style

Taking the exterior styling aspects first, the car looked bigger and chunkier but in real terms it was only 3in longer than the XK120 because of the thicker bumper bars front and rear.

There were actually very few physical changes to the body of the Roadster or drophead coupé although, as applied to all the XK140s, the boot lid was shorter to allow space for the new full-width rear bumper and number plate plinth. The bonnet and boot were still pressed in aluminium instead of steel and the bonnet for the two open models was actually the exact same pressing as the XK120. The Roadster doors also looked

identical to the previous model but, in fact, were very subtly different although the same outer aluminium skins were used.

The bumper bar change came about primarily for the North American market. Not best known for their careful driving, particularly when parking, owners complained of the lack of protection afforded on the XK120 by the thin bumpers at the front and virtually no protection at all at the rear except for the overriders. The shape and style adopted came directly from the Mark VII saloon (or more precisely the Mark VIIM). Of ribbed section with considerable depth, a wrap-around feature, and substantial overriders, the new bumpers not only provided excellent protection but also added a significant amount of chrome (also ideally suited to the US market!) and weight. The better protection came not only from the size of the bumpers but also from their fixings, now directly through the front wings and bolted to the chassis. Horizontal flat valance panels (painted body colour) fitted at the front on each side between the bumper bar and the wings hid the bumper irons. These were pre-drilled to accept the extra cost option of Lucas fog/spot lamps (a standard fitment on SE models).

The beauty of the XK120's line is now upset by the additional chrome of the XK140. This particular example is fitted with period chromium-plated wire wheels. (Courtesy Tom Wood)

The whole frontal appearance of the XK140 gave it stature with the abundance of chromium plate and extra lighting. The fog and spot lamps were an extra cost option but standard on this SE model. (Courtesy Tom Wood)

A nice new enamel badge, fitted to the radiator grille this time instead of the bonnet top. The badge was unique to this model. (Courtesy Tom Wood)

The new style prominent headlamps, with bolted on surround and 'spears', which became a well-known feature of all future XKs and the big flagship saloons. (Courtesy Tom Wood)

In a move away from the complex type of radiator grille fitted to the XK120, the XK140's was cast thus giving a more prominent look to the front of the car. (Courtesy Tom Wood)

Other changes at the front included a more prominent cast radiator grille with thicker integrated vertical slats. This incorporated a new enamelled metal badge with the word 'Jaguar' in the centre, surrounded at the top by 'X.K. 140' and at the bottom by 'Coventry. England'. The headlamps also came in for revision, now of the same type as fitted to the Mark VIIM with heavy chromium-plated surrounds, restyled 'spears' and the centrally mounted 'J' monogram in each lamp.

The front wings of the XK140 Roadster and drophead coupé were virtually identical to the XK120, incorporating the later production XK120's integrated side-mounted sidelamps but now these were accompanied by separate indicator lamps attached at the base of each front wing, again *à la* Mark VIIM. To accommodate them, flat areas were pressed into the wings to ensure a flush fit. The under-bumper air vents were made larger to aid cooling. Finally, a full-length central chromium

bonnet strip replaced the XK120's bonnet-mounted 'growler' badge.

At the rear two separate quarter bumpers and overriders (matching the front design) were fitted almost flush to the body. This was because of space problems in the centre, where the boot lid and number plate housing were positioned. As well as the bumper change, there were combined rear lamp/indicator units, mounted in more substantial chromed Mazak plinths. These were a common item fitted to many cars of the period from the humble Morris Minor to Lagonda, although the plinths always differed to suit the contours of each model's wings.

Matching the bonnet, there was a centre chrome strip down the boot lid, part of which incorporated a new style push-button handle and lock and another, quite large, enamelled badge proclaiming the Jaguar Le Mans wins up to that time and reading 'WINNER LE MANS 51–3'.

The number plate mounting was moved down to where the XK120 boot lid used to extend. When the boot lid was opened the spare wheel was no longer visible as it was covered by a plywood lid, also forming the boot floor, the underside of which neatly held some of the tools in position.

The drophead coupé version, apart from the changes identified above, was essentially the same car externally as the XK120 variant. Indeed, so similar were they that Jaguar chose to retouch the artwork used for the XK120 drophead for the XK140 pictures in the new brochure – something it also did with the Roadster!

At the rear of the car only the tonneau panels were different but the front wings and bonnet were 4in shorter and the headlamp pods were duly shortened by 2in for aesthetic reasons. The sills, of course, were also different.

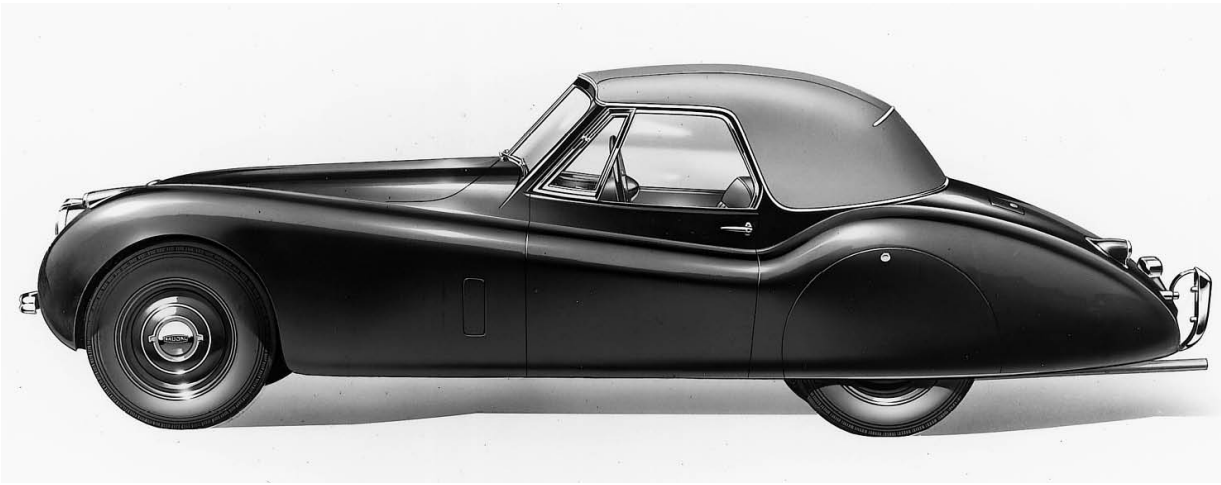
The long rear deck of the XK140 Roadster is emphasised by the centre chrome strips running down from the rear seats right to the rear tip of the boot lid. This picture also reveals a number of the changed features from the XK120: the larger rear lamps with chromed plinths, the rear number plate mounting, and the quarter bumpers. (Courtesy Tom Wood)

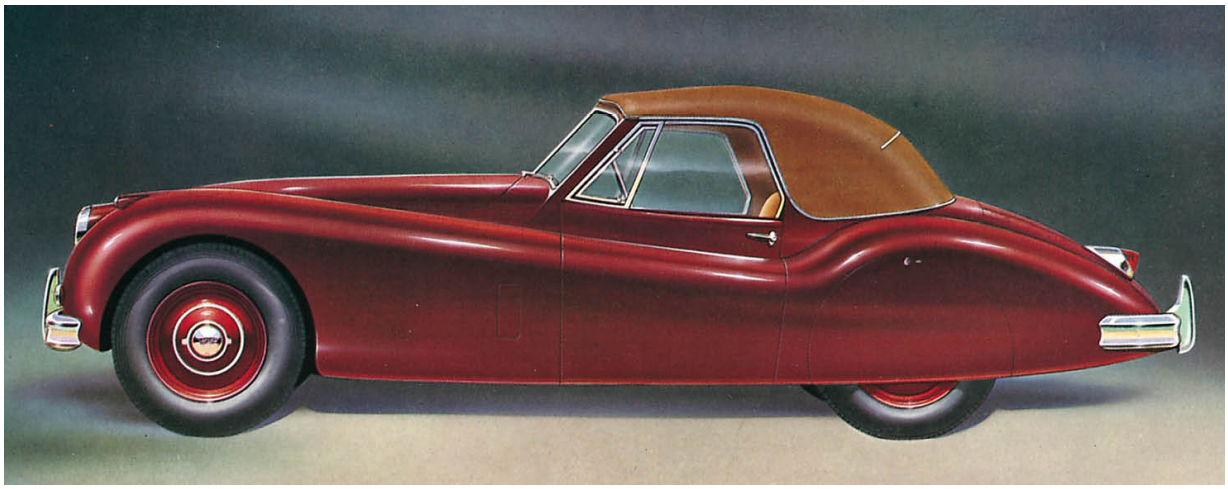
A new, quite prominent, enamel badge for the boot lid showing off the Le Mans wins in 1951 and 1953. (Courtesy Tom Wood)

Although shallow, the XK140's is a much neater boot area than the earlier cars, with the spare wheel completely hidden under the floor. (Courtesy Tom Wood)

The XK140 drophead coupé retained all the prettiness of the original 120 design but with a much larger and more practical rear window. (Courtesy Tom Wood)

The detailing on this splendid, authentic XK140 includes the original vehicle licence disc. (Courtesy Tom Wood)





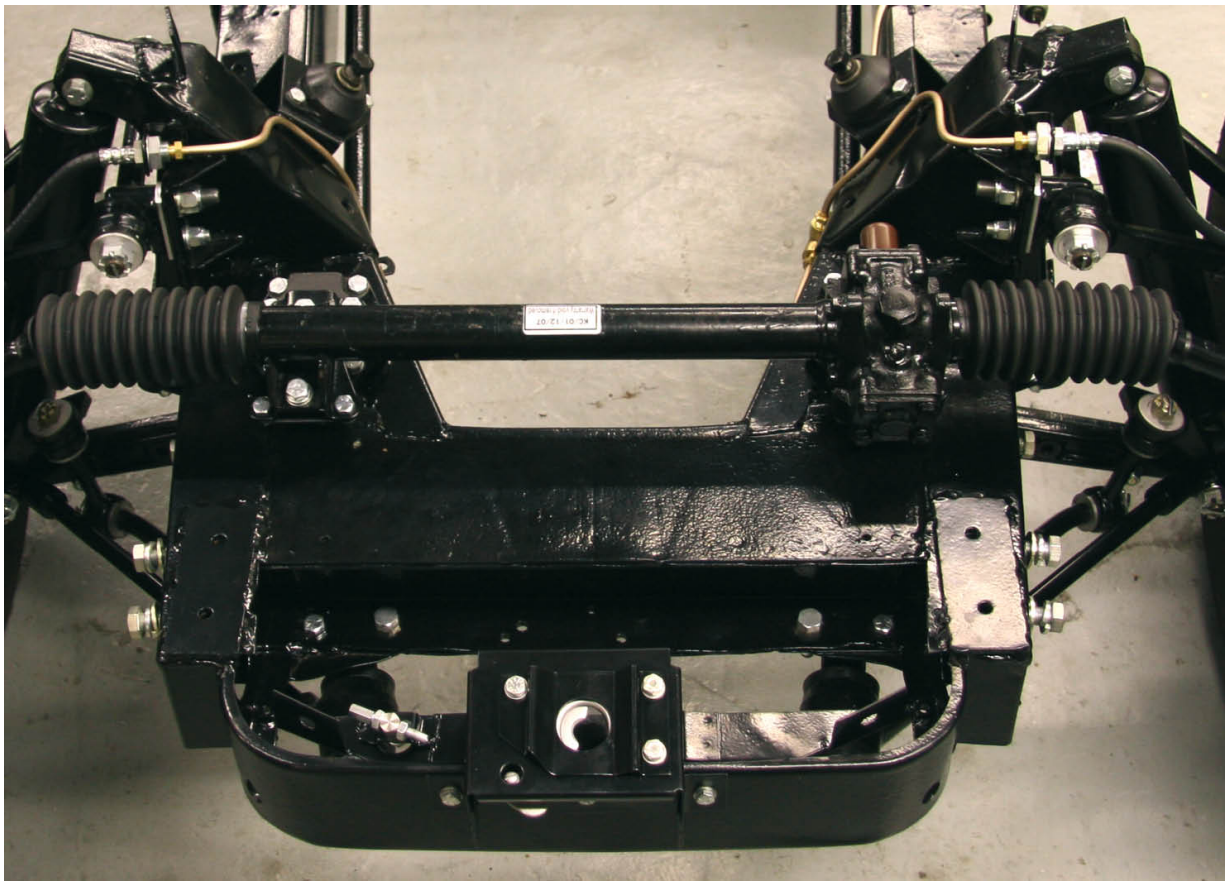
Clever artistry allowed the earlier XK120 drophead coupé artwork (above) to be transposed into the XK140 model (below). (Courtesy Jaguar Cars Ltd)

Steering and suspension

The chassis was altered to accommodate rack and pinion steering, so that the engine could be situated 3in further forward in the frame. This was to satisfy complaints levied at the XK120 about interior space. Moving the engine forward permitted the bulkhead to be repositioned by the same amount and raised by about 1in, allowing more legroom with better accommodation for the driver. This bulkhead was completely different from the XK120 with extended footwell areas.

Minor changes were made to the suspension, the biggest of which was at the rear with the fitment of Girling telescopic type dampers instead of the old lever-arm type.

All XK140s still came as standard with 16in x 5½in steel wheels with hubcaps and full spats covering the rear wheels. Slimmer 5in wire wheels were available, as before, as an extra cost option either to match the paint finish, stove-enamelled or chromium-plated. As before, if wire wheels were specified when buying a new car, the spats were removed and the wheelarch lips beaded.



Rack and pinion steering was a major innovation for Jaguar at this time and served the XK140 well. (Courtesy Author)

The XK140 fixed-head coupé

The fixed-head coupé was a different matter and emphasised more important changes made in the transition to 140 from 120 that affected all the variants. It was the most significantly altered of the cars from the original XK120 design. The whole centre section of the car was different from either the Roadster or drophead coupé. The roof of the 140 was extended rearwards an extra 6¾in and raised by 1½in to provide more space and headroom. The roof changes incorporated a larger rear screen and enlarged rear side quarterlights.

Much wider (5½in) and heavier doors were fitted to the fixed-head. This also meant revised window frames and front quarterlights. The doors now incorporated push-button handles and locks instead of the pull-down type from the XK120.

The XK140 fixed-head coupé was the most strikingly different XK since 1948 with its higher roof, larger window areas, wider doors, and generally bigger feel both inside and out. (Courtesy Tom Wood)

A direct comparison between the XK120 (left) and XK140 fixed-head coupés. (Courtesy Author)

The change of design for the XK140 necessitated new doors, window frames, and larger rear quarterlights. (Courtesy Tom Wood)

For the first time on an XK there were proper push-button door handles and locks – but only for the fixed-head model. (Courtesy Tom Wood)

Interior comfort

The interior showed a marked improvement in legroom, particularly for the fixed-head, and the whole interior felt much roomier in both the open top models. Seats, essentially the same as the old model, had slimmer backs to improve space further. With that alteration came the fitment of occasional rear seats, but only on the fixed-head and the drophead coupé models. Merely a couple of thin cushions and backrests fitted on either side of the transmission tunnel, these 'seats' were more suited to children than to adults except perhaps for one adult on a very short journey! To accommodate this change, the batteries were removed and the rear tonneau panels (different on each model) were shortened. With the fixed-head there was still room for a fold-down area that allowed access to the boot, ideal for larger items such as golf clubs. Seat runners and adjustment were also extended. Door trims were little different from the XK120 except that on the fixed-head and drophead the conventional interior door handles were

replaced by sliders.

A nice touch was the replacement of the rather bulbous horn-push in the centre of the four-spoke cast Bluemel steering wheel by a flat button with gold ‘growler’ motif and border surrounds, a change first seen on the very last XK120s.

Taking the dashboards by model, the Roadster looked virtually identical to the last of the XK120s except for some switchgear changes and the fact that there was more shaping to the side panels and it sat at a more vertical angle. The indicator control switch was now situated to the side of the dashboard with a timer.

As usual the interiors were very well finished, in this case the drophead coupé with slimmer seat backs. (Courtesy Tom Wood)

The occasional (literally!) rear seating arrangement for the fixed-head and drophead models. (Courtesy Tom Wood)

The later style of steering wheel with the flat horn push depicting the famous Jaguar 'growler'. (Courtesy Tom Wood)

The fixed-head and the drophead now used virtually the same door trim casings with pockets, wood cappings, and now new 'slider' door handles. (Courtesy Tom Wood)

The general layout of the wood veneered facias of the fixed-head and drophead models again was unchanged from the XK120 but now there were two ashtrays, for driver and passenger, and in the centre was the indicator switch. When overdrive was fitted, this was activated by a Bakelite switch at the side of the facia. When automatic transmission was specified, this was operated via a quadrant, similar to that used on the Mark VII saloon, fitted over the top of the steering column.

The hood arrangement for the XK140 Roadster was a direct carryover from the XK120. The hood for the drophead coupé model differed from its predecessor in that it was by necessity longer. It also incorporated a larger rear screen with an extra zip fastener.

Plenty of veneered wood, a quality headlining, and courtesy lamps help the fixed-head retain its ultra-refined feel and grand tourer image. (Courtesy Tom Wood)

Dashboard arrangement for the Roadster followed the style, if not exactly, of the XK120. Items like the period radio were still considered an add-on. (Courtesy Tom Wood)

There were minor changes from XK120 to XK140 for the facia of the drophead and fixed-head. Note the two ashtrays now, for example. (Courtesy Tom Wood)

Mechanical changes

The XK120 SE engine (by then developing 190bhp) was fitted as standard to XK140 models, except for the fitment of a smaller capacity steel oil sump. The inlet manifold was also redesigned, incorporating the carburettor thermostat, and had better water passages. Cooling was improved by the fitting of a more efficient radiator. It was tilted at an angle to get it under the bonnet and allow space at the bottom for the new rack and pinion steering, the air being sucked in by a new eight-bladed fan within a cowled surround.

XK140s reverted to a single-pipe exhaust system (except for the SE models) although this system differed from the XK120 in that it not only ran two pipes from the manifold back but these passed through individual silencers instead of one twin-pipe silencer and through holes in the chassis to improve ground clearance. The chrome-finished tailpipes emerged either side of the rear overriders.

The gearbox remained the standard Moss four-speed unit (with three synchromesh gears) but was now available with the same Laycock-de

Normanville overdrive unit (on top gear only) as fitted to the Mark VIIM. This effectively created a fifth gear, reducing the engine speed and noise level, and improving fuel consumption. The chassis required a minor change to accommodate the overdrive unit, which was operated from a neat facia-mounted switch that lit up when engaged.

A first for a Jaguar sports car, and indeed for many sports and grand tourers, was the availability of the Borg-Warner Model DG three-speed automatic transmission. This was due in part to the success experienced with the Mark VII saloon. The gearbox was available only on left-hand-drive fixed-head and drophead models from January 1956. The fitment of this type of transmission served two purposes. Firstly, it was ideally suited to the important American market where such transmissions were the norm anyway and the Moss gearbox was felt to be rather agricultural even by the standards of the day. Secondly, it was advantageous to Jaguar Cars because of problems experienced over the supply of Moss gearboxes at the time.

The sloping radiator of the XK140. (Courtesy Tom Wood)

Overdrive operation was now controlled by a Bakelite switch neatly fitted into the dashboard top rail. The switch was illuminated when overdrive was engaged. (Courtesy Tom Wood)

The rarely seen XK140 with automatic transmission. The quadrant-style selector from the period was first seen on the Mark VII saloon. (Courtesy Author)

The XK140 engine installation, in this case an SE model with the C-type cylinder head. (Courtesy Tom Wood)

There was an issue initially arising from a restriction only allowing the fitment of the Borg-Warner transmission to cars due for export, instigated by the Government, as the gearboxes had to be imported in the first place. However, once Borg-Warner had set up a factory in the UK, supply was much easier and right-hand-drive versions of both the fixed-head and drophead became available with automatic transmission from June 1956.

A major move forward came with the fitment of Alford & Alder rack and pinion steering for all XK140s. This was mounted to the chassis via rubber to soak up backlash from the road. With the more precise steering came another advantage in the form of a universally jointed steering column that permitted the steering wheel to be positioned at a less acute angle, another common complaint with the XK120. The steering wheel design was altered slightly; although of the same recognised four-spoke style, the early cast wheels were replaced by others with a plastic coating, like the compact saloons.

Minor modifications affected what were essentially the exact same drum

brakes fitted to the later XK120s, although the XK140 reverted to the single master cylinder system from the earlier 120 days. Initially the handbrake was changed to a conventional type but in July 1956 reverted to a 'fly-off' style.

The 140's suspension was for the most part unchanged. Stronger and larger-diameter torsion bars were fitted to all models, coming from the XK120 SE model, and the rear lever-arm dampers were replaced by conventional Girling telescopic units.

For those requiring more power a C-type cylinder head was available at extra cost. This was a direct development of that used on the C-type racing cars of this period, with the inlet and exhaust porting and the exhaust valves increased in diameter. Fitted to an XK140 SE model, the engine developed 210bhp at 5,750rpm.

Because of the extra room behind the seats, Roadster and drophead coupé models now had a single 12-volt battery that was mounted in the rear section of one of the front wings (varying according to whether the car was left- or right-hand drive) but always fitted in the opposite wing to the steering column. This battery was accessed via a metal panel in the wheelarch. For the fixed-head model the twin six-volt batteries were retained, with one fitted inside each of the front wings.

All these changes altered the weight distribution and improved the handling of the XK, the new distribution being 50.3 per cent front and 49.7 per cent rear (47.5 and 52.5 per cent respectively for the XK120).

Choice of colours

The range of colour schemes available for the XK140 had been expanded from the XK120's:

Exterior: Black
- Interior Roadster: Red or Red/Biscuit
- Interior Fixed-head: Red, Tan, Grey or Biscuit
- Interior Drophead: Red, Tan, Grey or Biscuit
- Hood: Black or Tan (dhc only)

Exterior: Birch Grey
- Interior Roadster: Red or Red/Biscuit
- Interior Fixed-head: Red, Blue, or Grey

Interior Drophead: Red, Blue, or Pale Grey
Hood: French Grey or Black

Exterior: Pastel Green
Interior Roadster: Suede Green
Interior Fixed-head: Suede Green
Interior Drophead: Suede Green or Grey
Hood: Fawn or Black

Exterior: Pearl Grey
Interior Roadster: Red, Blue, or Grey
Interior Fixed-head: Red, Blue, or Grey
Interior Drophead: Red, Blue, or Grey
Hood: Blue, Black, French Grey

Exterior: Pacific Blue
Interior Roadster: Blue or Grey
Interior Fixed-head: Blue or Grey
Interior Drophead: Blue or Grey
Hood: Blue or Black

Exterior: British Racing Green
Interior Roadster: Suede Green or Tan
Interior Fixed-head: Suede Green or Tan
Interior Drophead: Suede Green or Tan
Hood: Gunmetal or Black

Exterior: Dove Grey
Interior Roadster: Tan or Biscuit
Interior Fixed-head: Tan or Biscuit
Interior Drophead: Tan or Biscuit
Hood: Fawn, Sand, or Black

Exterior: Suede Green
Interior Roadster: Suede Green
Interior Fixed-head: Suede Green
Interior Drophead: Suede Green
Hood: French Grey or Black

Exterior: Red
Interior Roadster: Red or Red/Biscuit
Interior Fixed-head: Red
Interior Drophead: Red

Hood: Fawn or Black
Exterior: Lavender Grey
Interior Roadster: Red, Pale Blue, or Suede Green
Interior Fixed-head: Suede Green or Red
Interior Drophead: Red, Pale Blue, or Suede Green
Hood: Fawn or Black
Exterior: Battleship Grey
Interior Roadster: Red or Red/Biscuit
Interior Fixed-head: Red or Grey
Interior Drophead: Red, Grey, or Biscuit
Hood: Gunmetal or Black
Exterior: Cream (Old English White)
Interior Roadster: Red or Red/Biscuit
Interior Fixed-head: Red
Interior Drophead: Red or Pale Blue
Hood: Fawn, Black, or Blue
Exterior: Pastel Blue
Interior Roadster: Light/Dark Blue or Blue
Interior Fixed-head: Light Blue
Interior Drophead: Light Blue
Hood: French Grey, Black, or Blue
Exterior: Maroon
Interior Roadster: Red or Biscuit
Interior Fixed-head: Red or Biscuit
Interior Drophead: Red or Biscuit
Hood: Black or Sand

What the XK140 cost at launch

Roadster
Price: £1,127 10s
Purchase tax: £460 18s 4d
Total: £1,598 8s 4d
Fixed-head coupé
Price: £1,140
Purchase tax: £476 2s 6d
Total: £1,616 2s 6d

Drophead coupé
Price: £1,160
Purchase tax: £484 9s 2d
Total: £1,644 9s 2d

Extras

SE specification
Price: £106
Purchase tax: £45 5s 5d
Total: £150 5s 5d

Overdrive
Price: £45
Purchase tax: £18 15s 10d
Total: £63 15s 10d

Optional extras

Some options were carried over from the XK120, others were new:

Windscreen washers (standard on SE)
Wire wheels (standard on SE)
Chromium-plated wire wheels
Dunlop racing tyres
Chromed Rimbellishers for disc wheels
External luggage rack on boot lid
Lucas matching fog and spot lamps (standard on SE)
Smaller diameter 16in steering wheel
Dunlop whitewall tyres
Wing mirrors
Various radio installations

There were also performance enhancements, many of which came from the XK120 model such as the cowled rear-view mirror, aero screens, and bucket seats. Others now also included 2in SU carburettors and the C-type cylinder head.


YXK 701


GB
NSL 806

Comparison pictures of the three XK140 variants (first to last): drophead, Roadster and fixed-head. The latter now offers a much larger rear window, giving better visibility. (Courtesy Tom Wood)

Bucket seats had long been an option for owners, even with the earlier XK120s, and were still available for the XK140s. The big advantage was much more lateral support. (Courtesy Tom Wood)

What the press thought of the XK140

Road & Track magazine featured the XK140 Roadster in June 1955, nearly four years after it last tested the equivalent XK120 model. The test car was the SE model with better performance, and the testers remarked on how well the car behaved although it was quieter than they remembered with the XK120, not just in the exhaust department but also noise levels from the engine.

They claimed the new rack and pinion steering was without fault and that despite the stiffer springing, the car actually rode better. They also commented on the ease with which they could regularly achieve the same performance figures without undue stress on the engine. In closing, the magazine's overall opinion was 'the standard of the world has been, and still is, the Jaguar – in the sports car category'.

Laurence Pomeroy, writing in *The Motor* of 23 November 1955 about one of his cross-country exploits in various cars, including an XK140 SE fixed-head coupé, stated: 'I would simply say that I am well acquainted

with the cars of the world. To most I am indifferent, a number I respect, a few I admire, of one I stand in some awe; but an XK140 hardtop with a D-type close-ratio gearbox, and some hand tailored seats upholstered in buttoned style with Connolly's best hide, I covet and would relish.'

Autosport got its hands on an XK140 fixed-head coupé towards the end of 1955 and John Bolster wrote: 'Now that I have driven it, I can state categorically that it is a great improvement in every important respect.' Immediately upon getting into the car he noted the better driving position, the ease of use of the pedals and even space to rest the left foot when off the clutch pedal. The improved legroom was instantly obvious and the improved rake of the steering wheel helped.

Performance he found outstanding to the point that he regularly achieved an indicated 135mph. He found that 100mph could be achieved in just 26.2sec and easily held as a cruising speed in overdrive. He also found that the new rack and pinion system transformed the handling and the suspension, providing a feel of complete control. Despite the old braking system carried over from the XK120, John Bolster applauded the XK140 with its racing linings. Of the body styling he wrote: 'The body is a delightful piece of work… general appearance is excellent, for the lines are artistically without fault, and there is no unnecessary decoration.'

A month later it was *The Autocar*'s turn in the same car (RHP576). The testers didn't find the new car wanting by way of performance or handling and remarked on its docility and flexibility in traffic as well as its ability to cruise at between 100 and 110mph and yet still allow normal conversation to take place. They mentioned little difference in performance between this car and the equivalent XK120 they had tested previously, despite the increased weight of the XK140. The improved weight distribution had eliminated the earlier car's oversteer and the steering was light but positive.

The Motor carried out an in-depth appraisal of British sports cars in 1956, describing the XK140 as '…in a class of its own in almost every respect. It combines roadster comfort – one almost said luxury – with sports car performance and handling, and although bought mostly these days for normal motoring rather than competition work, no club meeting or big rally would seem complete without an XK contingent to lend glamour to the occasion. For the XK140 is undoubtedly glamorous, so much so that it has become an international symbol of prosperity and success. The Jaguar,

however, shares with the Corinthian of Regency times the ability to combine elegance with performance. Its lovely lines have not dated in the slightest since the XK120 burst upon an incredulous and astonished world at the 1948 show, but its handling has been greatly improved by the adoption of rack and pinion steering and by various other steering and suspension changes, which constitute the chief difference between the XK120 and XK140.' Stirring stuff!

The XK140 and its rivals

Choice was now much wider for the sports car buying public and alongside the new XK140 came some strong competition in the form of exciting new cars, examples of which came from AC, Alfa Romeo, and Mercedes-Benz.

Make and Model: AC Ace (Bristol engine)
- Top speed: 117mph
- 0-60mph: 9.0sec
- Standing ¼-mile: 16.8sec
- Fuel consumption: 18mpg
- Price inc tax: £1,559

Make and Model: Aston Martin DB2/4
- Top speed: 120mph
- 0-60mph: 12.6sec
- Standing ¼-mile: 18.9sec
- Fuel consumption: 20mpg
- Price inc tax: £2,728

Make and Model: Austin-Healey 100
- Top speed: 107mph
- 0-60mph: 11.2sec
- Standing ¼-mile: 18.5sec
- Fuel consumption: 22mpg
- Price inc tax: £1,064

Make and Model: Jaguar XK140 SE fixed-head
- Top speed: 129mph
- 0-60mph: 11.0sec
- Standing ¼-mile: 17.4sec
- Fuel consumption: 21mpg

Price inc tax: £1,766
Make and Model: Frazer Nash Targa Florio
Top speed: 114mph
0-60mph: 10.4sec
Standing ¼-mile: 17.4sec
Fuel consumption: 20mpg
Price inc tax: £2,339
Make and Model: Mercedes-Benz 190SL
Top speed: 107mph
0-60mph: 13.3sec
Standing ¼-mile: 17.8sec
Fuel consumption: 24mpg
Price inc tax: £2,693
Make and Model: Mercedes-Benz 300SL
Top speed: 135mph
0-60mph: 8.8sec
Standing ¼-mile: 16.1sec
Fuel consumption: 18mpg
Price inc tax: £4,393
Make and Model: Porsche 356 Super
Top speed: 125mph
0-60mph: 12.0sec
Standing ¼-mile: 18.0sec
Fuel consumption: 29mpg
Price inc tax: £1,956

This doesn't include cheaper examples, such as MG and Triumph, that still competed for the export markets with sports cars. Real competition came from the likes of the AC Ace (later available in Aceca fixed-head coupé form and to become available with more powerful engines). Then there was Mercedes-Benz. Although both its cars were considerably more expensive, they were more modern and represented the start of the foreign invasion of sporting models.

Sales going well

The XK140 had got off to a brilliant start in 1954 and 1955 and this

continued. Jaguar had now set up its own US sales company, as a wholly-owned subsidiary of Jaguar Cars Ltd. Exports were doing well and it appeared that nothing had been lost in the transition from XK120 to XK140. On the competition side the D-type sports/racing car had replaced the C-type and was doing its bit to uphold Jaguar's sporting reputation, from which the XK140 would benefit.

By February 1956, although the basic prices of XK140 models remained unaltered, purchase tax had changed. This produced a slight increase in the prices customers paid for their cars in the UK. A standard Roadster model increased by £94, a fixed-head by £95, and a drophead by £97. By now automatic transmission was available on the cars at an extra £128 before purchase tax.

Petrol rationing brought in by the British Government because of the Suez crisis in 1956 called for gentle driving. Ration books were issued over a four-month period and for an XK140 the fuel consumption was calculated to average out at a figure of around 29mpg with overdrive (seems high and difficult to achieve!), allowing only 10½ gallons of fuel a month.

The XK140 in competition

Well into the reign of the XK140, XK120s were still competing in many club events. In 1955 an XK120 actually came third in the Over 2,600cc Class on the Mobilgas Economy Run, achieving 43.81mpg. As for the XK140, this car was never intended to win races but to provide good performance and handling for grand touring, which it did very well.

However, there were times when it did compete, if not too successfully. In 1956 Peter Bolton and Bob Walshaw entered aborrowed XK140 fixed-head coupé in the Le Mans 24-hour race, where it was thrust in among much more powerful cars, not least Jaguar's own D-types (one of which won the race). The XK140 (for the most part a standard production example with a C-type head and larger fuel tank) acquitted itself admirably, getting up to 12th position and running for 21 hours at an average speed of 83mph. Unfortunately the car was eliminated from the race late on due to a premature fuel stop – a very unfortunate incident. However, the performance did show that an XK, nearly seven years on from its inception, was still very competitive.

XK140s continued to compete in many areas and across the world but

never to the same degree of success achieved by the XK120. Things had moved on.

C. F. Kerr in his XK140 drophead coupé on the Scottish Rally in 1956. He was typical of the many owners who still competed with their cars in the mid-1950s. The number of car badges at the front indicate that he was also a very enthusiastic motorist! (Courtesy The Motor magazine)

When he wasn't racing Jaguar saloons, John Coombs used his XK140 fixed-head coupé with appropriate number plate. (Courtesy The Autocar magazine)

Production changes

There were very few significant production changes carried out to the XK140 during its lifetime of just over two seasons. It wasn't until January of 1956 that the Borg-Warner automatic transmission was made available, initially for the overseas market only. Then in June of that year home-market cars could be so equipped, although automatic transmission was only ever fitted to either the fixed-head or drophead models.

In April 1956 two additional exterior colours were added, for the US market only. These were Arbor Green (turquoise) and Carmine Red (bright red).

By July 1956 the aluminium door skins used on XK140 fixed-heads and dropheads were replaced by steel, and in the same month the handbrake operation reverted to the XK120 'fly-off' type.

The array of promotional material available for the XK140 models. (Author's collection)

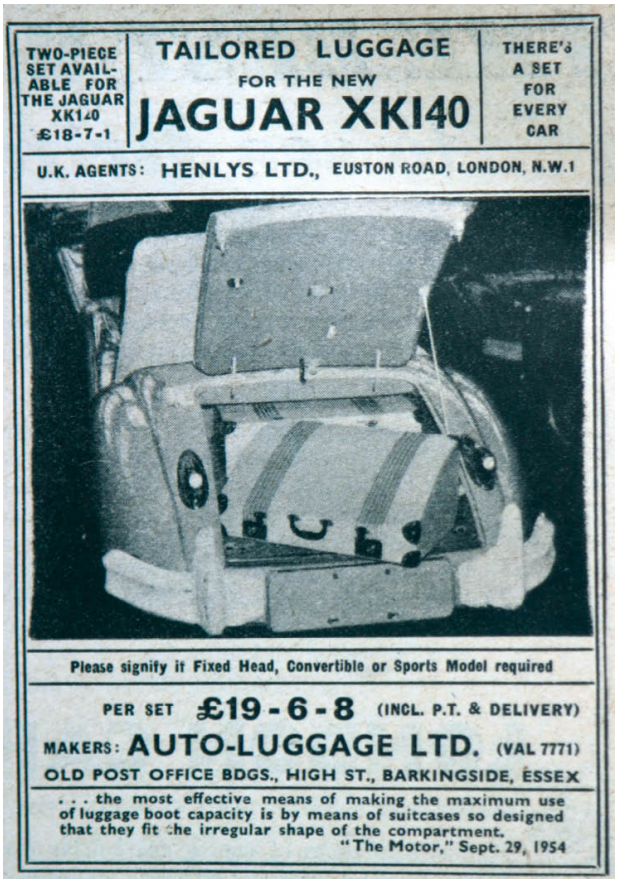
The XK140 on paper

The range of promotional material produced for the XK140 was quite large, given that it was only in production for such a short period. As well as the 'Advance Particulars' leaflet, the XK140 also featured in various range brochures with other Jaguar models.

For the European market the full-colour brochure was an extensive piece of publicity with detailed coloured artwork showing all the models (although mostly retouched XK120 pictures), full specifications, and even colour schemes. Over in the US, only one large brochure was produced. Although it was of a larger format and featured a striking gold background to the front cover, inside it was decidedly disappointing.

Lovely period advertisement for Quality Street, with a couple enjoying their chocolates with an XK140! (Author's collection)

Jaguar's US advertising sometimes tended to be very subtle, hence this full-page advertisement from Road & Track. (Courtesy Jaguar Daimler Heritage Trust)



A princely sum for fitted suitcases for your XK140! (Author's collection)

Buying a second-hand XK

It is worth looking at how the prices for the earlier XK120 models were faring by this time on the second-hand market and, how XK140s fared in depreciation terms within their production period. The examples here are taken from classified advertisements in *The Autocar* and *The Motor* of late 1955 and early 1956. A 1954 XK120 fixed-head coupé, Suede Green with matching interior and Michelin X tyres was asking £875; a year older SE model £795. Then a 1951 Roadster, Ivory with beige interior, twin exhaust and lots of extras was priced at £595.

In contrast a four-month-old XK140 drophead coupé with 4,500 miles on the clock was for sale at £1,550, which shows quite high demand as the car had lost only a couple of hundred pounds, not even the purchase tax figure!

In *The Motor* of 30 October 1957 John Eyles recalled his experiences with his first Jaguar, a second-hand XK140 fixed-head coupé. With the aid of a small legacy (as he put it), he purchased a suitable car and, taking a few

days off work, enjoyed driving the car across Europe.

The first two things he realised were the high average speed that could be achieved easily and maintained, and that if the driver accelerated rather than braked in corners, the car handled better! He found the performance exhilarating and the purposeful look of the car, both from the driver's seat and from the outside, always attracted attention.

He went on, waxing lyrical: 'One feels that one can drive away at maximum revs, immediately whatever the instruction book may say. All the controls have the same purposeful feeling. The handbrake, pulled gently on, would hold the car on the side of a house, yet it has a reserve. The clutch, the gear lever and the steering all feel as though they are purposefully carrying out their jobs. The brakes seemed to me to be wonderful although I suspect discs or servo assistance would be better. I wonder when the XK150 will prove the answer to my problem!'

XK140 production

Model: XK140 Roadster
- 1954: 575
- 1955: 1,451
- 1956: 1,130
- 1957: 191
- Total: 3,347

Model: XK140 fixed-head
- 1954: 4
- 1955: 1,809
- 1956: 961
- 1957: 24
- Total: 2,798

Model: XK140 drophead
- 1954: 92
- 1955: 1,455
- 1956: 1,199
- 1957: 44
- Total: 2,790

Model: Grand totals
- 1954: 671

1955: 4,715
1956: 3,290
1957: 259
Total: 8,935

Jaguar claimed that by 1956 it was possible to purchase an XK140 in up to 2,348 combinations of spec, colour and model.

Export success

In percentage terms the XK140 was a greater export success than the XK120, even though there weren't as many cars built. Over 7,000 examples were built with left-hand drive. Jaguar reported its largest ever order placed for 2,000 cars to go to North America during the first quarter of 1957; this amounted to $8.6m (£3m) and US sales broke all records in 1956. All this came during the reign of the XK140, which was part of that success.

By this time Jaguar had managed to export a total of over 43,000 cars, 20,000 of which had gone to the US. This equated to over $60m being earned by Jaguar for the UK, with cars exported to no fewer than 107 countries throughout the world.

This most striking example of the XK140, depicted on the front cover of the June 1955 issue of the US publication Road & Track, belonged to Mrs Peter Satori from Pasadena in California. Finished in Old English White with Cream upholstery and a matching Cream steering wheel, all the exterior brightwork was plated in 14-carat gold at a cost of $3,000 at that time! (Author's collection)

A used car test

In April 1959 *The Autocar* checked out a used 1955 XK140 fixed-head coupé. Price new had been £1,140 basic or £1,616 with purchase tax and it was then for sale at £895.

Registered in June 1955, the car had had two owners and showed a mileometer reading of 15,280, although the speedometer had been changed

at 35,000 miles. The test revealed marginal engine wear, consistent with a car of this mileage, and fair oil consumption of 1,500 miles per gallon. Timed 0–90mph acceleration was only 4sec behind that of the original road test car. The car rode on Michelin Xtyres and directional stability proved almost perfect. The testers noticed some weakness had developed in the gearbox and encountered serious brake fade, not found when the car was new! Some rust was identified around the roof gutters and doors. There were no signs of body repairs and the chrome was good but the interior wasn't particularly clean, with a grubby roof lining. Also, the overdrive packed up during the test, the clock didn't work, and neither did the rev counter.

Even so, the car came up to the high expectations held for it. Still providing extremely fast performance yet being docile, the XK140 offered quality accommodation, making it very worthy – particularly at the price asked.

The presence of the XK140 Roadster is shown to good effect in this front-three-quarter view. (Courtesy Tom Wood)

William Lyons is honoured

The best accolade Jaguar could have achieved came in January 1956 when William Lyons was designated a Knight Bachelor, at the age of 54 years, for his work in the British motor industry. As The Motor put it in its report: '…for the maintenance of a 34 year policy of providing products of a high quality and high performance at an astonishingly moderate price, has brought the Jaguar car to a position in which it has earned $60m dollars in the US since 1947 and by success and international sport gained a worldwide reputation as one of the most successful sports cars ever to have been produced in quantity.'

William Lyons had also been the President of the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders (SMMT) in 1950–51 and President of the Motor Industry Research Association (MIRA) in 1954. He had also been appointed Designer for Industry to the Royal Society of Arts.

Specifications: Jaguar XK140

ENGINE

Description

In-line twin overhead camshaft six-cylinder with chromed cast-iron block, aluminium cylinder head. Duplex chain-driven twin overhead camshafts operating valves via bucket tappets. Hemispherical combustion chambers. Aluminium alloy pistons with chromium-plated top rings, EN16 steel connecting rods. Seven-bearing crankshaft with sludge traps

Capacity

3,442cc (210cu in)

Bore and stroke

83mm x 106mm (3.27in x 4.17in)

Compression ratio

8.0:1 (optional 7.0:1, 9.0:1)

Maximum power

190bhp (gross) @ 5,500rpm
SE 210bhp (gross) @ 5,750rpm

Maximum torque
210lb ft (285Nm) @ 2,500rpm
SE 213lb ft (289Nm) @ 4,000rpm

Carburettors
Twin SU 1¾in H6

TRANSMISSION

Gearbox
Moss four-speed with synchromesh on top three gears. Optional Laycock-de Normanville overdrive on top gear. From 1956 optional Borg-Warner DG three-speed automatic gearbox on drophead or fixed-head coupé models only

Ratios
1st: 3.37:1 (Manual) / 2.30:1 (Automatic)
2nd: 1.98:1 (Manual) / 1.43:1 (Automatic)
3rd: 1.36:1 (Manual) / – (Automatic)
Top: 1.00:1 (Manual) / 1.00:1 (Automatic)
(Overdrive): 0.78:1 (Manual) / – (Automatic)
Reverse: 3.37:1 (Manual) / 2.30:1 (Automatic)

Clutch
Borg & Beck, 10in single dry plate

Propshaft
Hardy Spicer, needle roller bearings

Rear axle
Salisbury 4HA hypoid bevel, ratio 3.54:1 (optional 3.31:1, 4.27:1), with overdrive 4.09:1

BRAKES

Front
Lockheed drum, 12in x 2¼in, two leading shoes

Rear

Lockheed drum, 12in x 2¼in, single leading shoe

Operation
Lockheed hydraulic

Handbrake
Lever with cable linkage to rear drums (later ‘fly-off’ type)

SUSPENSION
Front
Independent. Double wishbones, torsion bars, telescopic dampers, anti-roll bar

Rear
Live axle, semi-elliptic springs, Girling telescopic dampers

STEERING
System type
Alford & Alder rack and pinion

Number of turns lock to lock
2¾

Turning circle
33ft 0in (10.06m)

Steering wheel
Bluemel four-spoke, 17in (optional 16in) diameter, adjustable for reach

WHEELS AND TYRES
5½J x 16in steel disc wheels, optional 5J x 16in painted or chromed wire wheels

Tyres
6.00-16in Dunlop Road Speed cross-ply

PERFORMANCE

The Autocar road test of SE overdrive fixed-head coupé, 9 December 1955

Top speed
129mph (207kph)

Acceleration
0–50mph (80kph): 7.5sec
0–60mph (96kph): 11.0sec
0–70mph (112kph): 14.2sec
0–80mph (128kph): 16.9sec
0–90mph (144kph): 22.7sec
0–100mph (160kph): 29.5sec
Standing quarter mile (402m): 17.4sec

Fuel consumption
21.7mpg (13.0l/100km)

DIMENSIONS
Length
14ft 8in (4,470mm)

Width
5ft 4½in (1,638mm)

Height
Roadster 4ft 4½in (1,334mm)
Fixed-head and drophead coupés 4ft 7in (1,397mm)

Wheelbase
8ft 6in (2,591mm)

Track
Front: 4ft 3½in (1,308mm)
Rear: 4ft 33/8in (1,305mm)

Ground clearance
7⅛in (181mm)

Weight (dry)
Roadster 2,744lb (1,245kg)
Fixed-head coupé 2,856lb (1,295kg)

Jaguar XK150
1957–1961

(Courtesy Tom Wood)

1957
Subtle but extensive changes

The next part of our XK story commences in 1957 when, after all the turbulence the previous year, with the Suez crisis, petrol rationing in Europe, a hefty increase in the bank lending rate, and industrial problems leading to lay-offs, things were improving for the British motor industry. Output was up again, most of which went in exports, and the demand for British sports cars was still very high, despite more cars becoming available. In the first two months of 1957 UK exports of cars into the United States achieved 40 per cent of all car imports. Jaguar models, including the XK140, had played their part in this success.

Initially a greater problem for the company was a major fire that took place at the Browns Lane plant in February 1957, when a large percentage of the factory was destroyed. This put back the launch of its new 3.4-litre compact saloon and must have had an effect on the introduction of the XK150. The fire also led to the final demise of the racing D-type, although the 16 remaining bodyshells were hastily made up as roadgoing sports/racing models, called the XK-SS.

Modernising the XK

There are many examples in the long history of the Jaguar marque when one can quite easily say that the first design expression was the best and most pure to William Lyons's concepts. However, it can also be said that every change and development of a model was done to enhance the overall design and, to some extent, rectify issues raised during the earlier life of that car. Certainly the pros and cons of how effective the XK150 was as a successor to the 120 and 140 can be debated for evermore, particularly by today's owners; each will have his/her own reasons for favouring a particular car. The fact remains that the original concept dating from 1948, despite changes to produce the XK140, had to be modernised and adapted to suit a changing market with stiffer competition. The XK150 was a justifiable compromise, given that a completely new model was out of the

question at that time.

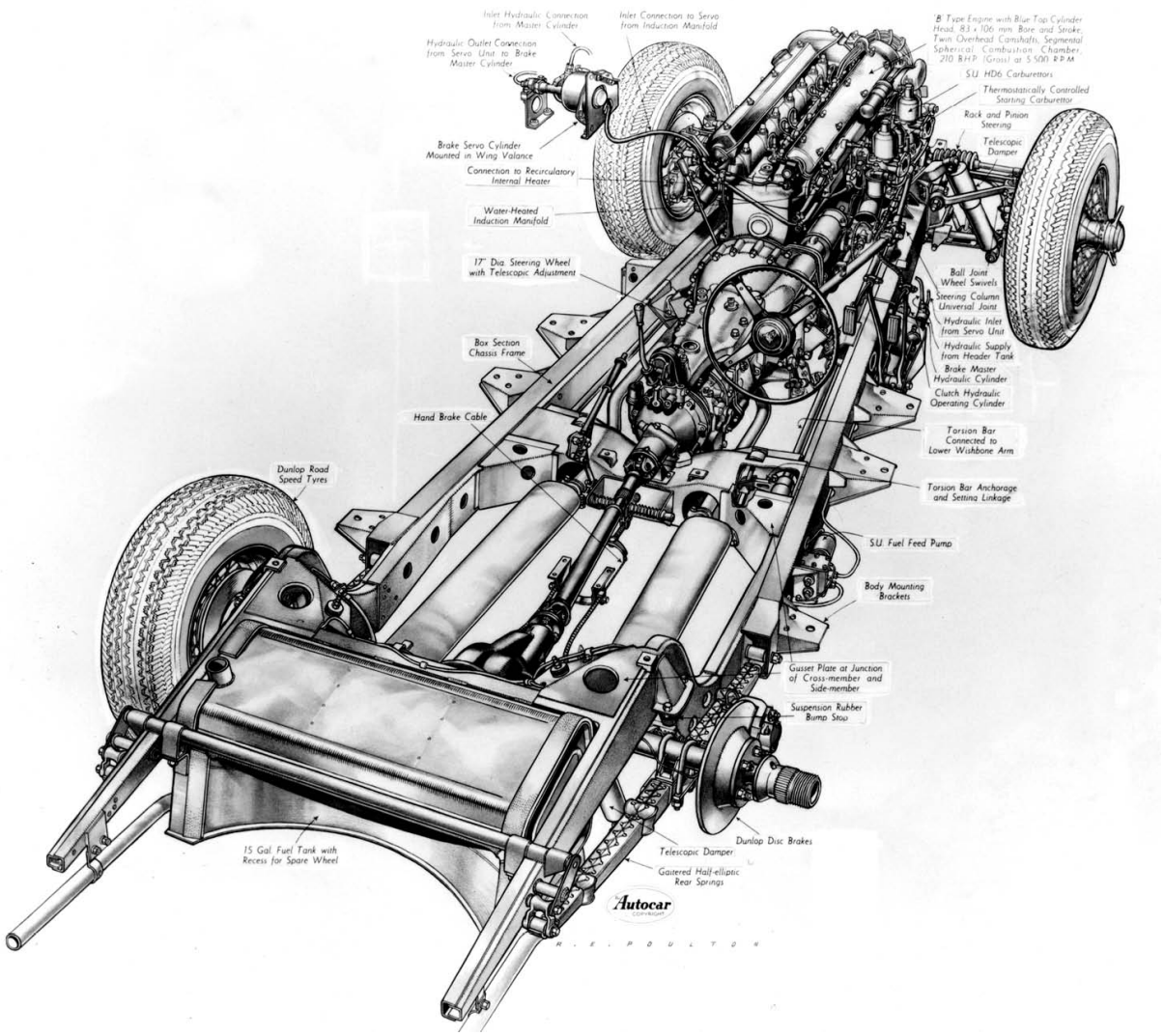
The XK150 (a natural progression in terms of model designation if not applicable to the car's maximum speed!) was announced in May 1957, the first time an XK had not been launched to coincide with a motor show. It is also interesting that Jaguar chose to launch only *two* variants of the new car, a fixed-head coupé and a drophead coupé, at this time. It was a direct replacement for the XK140 models, although examples of the earlier cars were still on sale for a few months. It was a somewhat more radical move from the XK140 than that model was from the XK120, although there was no doubting its parentage.

Disc brakes and automatic transmission

Under the skin the XK150 was very much a repeat of what went before – the same chassis, same engine (although both with modifications), gearbox, and suspension.

Chassis changes mainly involved removed or amended bracketry and some alterations at the extreme front. The one major modification was the provision of a third outrigger on each side. The suspension and steering were virtually an exact carryover from the XK140, a slight change being made to the steering to provide better cushioning from road kick-back.

The big departure, however, came in the braking system. Jaguar had experimented with disc brakes as early as 1951 and along with Dunlop developed the system fitted to the racing C-types that won the 1953 Le Mans race. The industry was slowly coming round to the opinion that disc brakes were the way forward but, despite some reports, Jaguar was not the first to fit them to road cars. Triumph did that with its TR3, as did Austin-Healey with its 100S and Jensen with its 541, all models that became available to the public in 1956.



The Autocar's drawing of the XK150's chassis reveals the salient features, including the Dunlop disc brakes. This was the last Jaguar sports car with a live axle and a conventional chassis clothed with a separate body. (Courtesy The Autocar magazine)

It wasn't until the introduction of the XK150 that Jaguar made the move to disc brakes fitted to all four wheels, coinciding with their fitment to the 3.4-litre compact saloon as well. However, initially disc brakes were listed as an optional extra for the XK although it is doubtful any cars were ever produced without them.

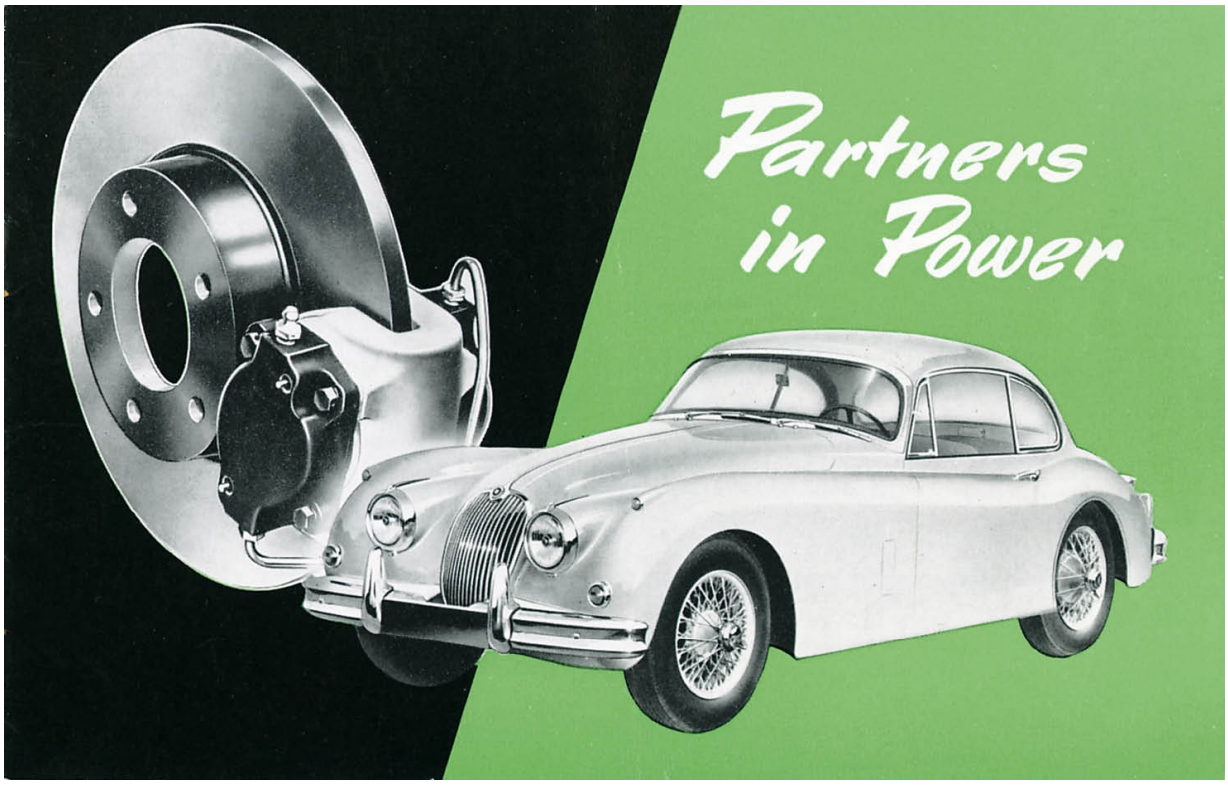
The braking system used 12in discs with a single pair of pistons initially fitted with round brake pads. This created more work in service as the cylinders had to be dismantled to change worn pads. A Lockheed 6in

vacuum servo provided assistance to the braking system using inlet manifold pressure to produce the vacuum, and incorporated a storage reservoir to provide a back-up vacuum should the engine stop. Even then the system would still operate, albeit with increased foot pressure required at the brake pedal. For the handbrake, a cable operated a separate caliper on the rear discs, activated by the usual 'fly-off' lever in the car.

Two variants of the straight-six XK engine were available initially for the XK150, the ex-XK140 190bhp unit (unchanged) and a new 210bhp engine introducing the new B-type cylinder head and giving more commonality of parts as it was also used on the Mark VIII and 3.4-litre saloons of that time. The new cylinder head provided improved bottom-end performance via the use of larger exhaust valves. The small inlet valve faces were convex with increased angles to improve gas flow. The net benefit of this allowed the engine to reach maximum torque of 216lb ft at only 3,000rpm. The new head also incorporated a revised inlet manifold with a separate water gallery. The same twin SU 1¾in HD6 carburettors were fitted as on the XK140.

The transmission also followed the XK140 route with the conventional Moss gearbox, with or without overdrive, or a Borg-Warner Model DG three-speed automatic transmission. The operation of this transmission altered from the lever above the steering column on the XK140 to an unusual method adopted for the small compact saloons and a few other cars of the period such as the Alvis 3 Litre. A Bakelite lever in a horizontal quadrant was attached underneath the centre of the dashboard. The only advantage of this method of operation appeared to be that it suited both left- and right-hand-drive cars. However, the system was never used again on any other Jaguar and dropped out of fashion elsewhere.

Everything else mechanically was very much as the XK140, even down to the choice of wheels and tyres.



So significant was the addition of disc brakes to a car in those days that a joint brochure was published by Dunlop and Jaguar on the new XK150. (Author's collection)

The unusual automatic transmission quadrant situated in the centre of the dashboard so that it suited both right- and left-hand-drive models. This type of operation was only fitted to the XK150 and Mark 1 Jaguar models. (Courtesy Author)

Cleaner external styling

The body styling of the XK150 was, it has to be said, cleaner, smoother, and certainly more modern looking than the previous models but was still unmistakably an XK.

The frontal view was, if anything, slightly more imposing than the previous models because of the use of a widened radiator grille which was reminiscent of that used on the 3.4-litre saloon and later 2.4-litre variant. Set within the top of the grille was another new badge, now acrylic; this saw the return of the ‘growler’ motif flanked at the top with the words ‘Jaguar’ and beneath ‘XK150’.

Frontal lighting treatment was exactly as the XK140 even down to the matching Lucas fog and spot lamps, where fitted.

The bumper bar took on a new shape with a curved depression in the centre to allow the widened radiator grille to open with the usual rear hinged bonnet. A similar bumper was adopted for the Mark 1 and Mark 2 saloons. The overriders for the XK150 took on the same prominent style of the previous model. The new bumper also necessitated mounting the number plate slightly lower on the bumper and in a different style to the XK140.

The bonnet was wider, slightly reshaped, flattened to tie in with the new grille, and incorporated a 4in wide rib pressed into the bonnet, on which was mounted a full-length central chromed strip. For the first time on an XK, a chromed leaping Jaguar mascot was available as an extra-cost option (necessitating a revised, shortened bonnet strip as well).

New front wings were needed to take in the revised line of the body; this

also required changes to the inner wings and fittings.

Another new radiator badge. (Courtesy Tom Wood)

This car is equipped with the American-style sealed beam headlamps that needed to be supplied for all XKs entering the US market. Also note the central bonnet rib, clearly indicating the extra width of these bonnets compared with earlier models. (Courtesy Tom Wood)

A wider looking frontal face to the XK150 with the increased size of the radiator grille. All the lighting remained the same but note the chrome strip on the bonnet. (Courtesy Tom Wood)

The XK150 looked bigger with yet more glass area. Note the smoothing out of the wing line from front to rear. (Courtesy Tom Wood)

A major styling change came in the windscreen. Gone were the separate split screens, which were replaced by a one-piece full-width windscreen, fitted to a higher scuttle. The screen wrapped around the corners, hiding the A-pillars when viewed from the front.

The remainder of the front was as the XK140 but the overall styling appeared more chunky and wider, even though the dimensions were exactly the same as its predecessor.

Moving round to the side of the car the XK had been cleverly remodelled to add a degree of modernity to the design. The front wing line had been lifted, very gently sloping across the door to the rear wing where the rise over the wheelarch wasn't as acute as on the earlier cars. This made the car look heavier and more bulbous and also added to the interior space. All these panels were new pressings and were accompanied by a slightly raised roofline on the fixed-head with a flatter top. This permitted the use of a much larger rear window and thinner pillars, improving visibility in the fixed-head coupés considerably.

The new styling meant redesigned doors for both the fixed-head and drophead coupé models, now incorporating the same type of handle and locks. New style chromed window frames featured the usual front opening quarterlights and the rear side windows of the fixed-head were larger than those in the XK140, still opening in the same way.

The rear of the new XK150 still very much carried the XK 'line' but had been tidied up. The rear wings were new pressings to accommodate the change in the line and the boot lid had more of a gradual slope to it with a new centre chrome strip and badge identifying those illustrious Jaguar Le Mans wins, updated to '1951 1953 1955 1956 1957'. There was a new square number plate style with chromed surround and lighting nacelle (incorporating the reversing lamp), similar (but not identical) to that fitted to the contemporary saloons.

A new one-piece ribbed rear bumper (similar to the saloons) fitted closer to the bodywork and wrapped around the sides. Overriders, handed as at the front, were positioned so that the rear lamp units could be mounted further down the wing line. The rear lamps were initially a carryover from the XK140.

Entirely new doors yet again for the drophead, with revised window frames as well. (Courtesy Tom Wood)

The totally revised side view with new doors and window frames. Note the one-piece wraparound windscreen. (Courtesy Tom Wood)

The XK150 fixed-head retained its curvaceous lines but in a more contemporary style. (Courtesy Tom Wood)

Revised boot lid badging now incorporating the later Le Mans wins.
(Courtesy Tom Wood)

At the rear there was now a full-width rear bumper of similar design and shape to those used on the previous models. Other changes included revised positioning for the lighting, a new number plate surround with reversing lamp nacelle, and a significantly improved rear screen size. (Courtesy Tom Wood)

Interior appointments

Some good interior improvements had been made. One's immediate impression was of an airier, lighter interior with more space. The extra space came about because the exterior redesign permitted the tops of the doors to be brought out, making for better elbow and shoulder room inside the car.

The other striking change from the previous models was the lack of wood veneer, a common fitting to all Jaguar saloons, XK fixed-head and drophead models up to this time. Instead all XK150 versions would feature the same style: a facia finished in padded grey leather, contrasting with the rest of the trim. A few very early cars featured an aluminium dash. Instead of the veneered capping to the top of the dashboard, on the XK150 this was also padded leather and more pronounced because of the slightly higher

scuttle line. The facia layout had also changed, although everything was still mounted centrally.

The instrument layout was now a direct copy from the equivalent 2.4- and 3.4-litre compact Jaguar saloons (although in those cars a veneered wood facing was still used). The two prominent instruments (rev counter and speedometer) were flanked by the fuel gauge on the left and combined oil pressure/water temperature gauge on the right. In the centre above and below the two larger instruments were the lighting switch and ammeter. The switchgear was often considered confusing and certainly not ergonomic by today's standards and there was no provision for an integrated ashtray or oddments drawer/radio aperture.

The cars continued to feature the established four-spoke Bluemel steering wheel, which was adjustable for reach. Initially the turn indicators were operated by the XK140-style timer switch on the outer dashboard area. The rear-view mirror type and position varied: affixed to the top of the dashboard in the drophead but in the normal position at the top of the screen rail in the fixed-head.

The new facia layout followed the compact Jaguar saloons, although wood was replaced by padded leather, or alloy on very early cars. (Courtesy Tom Wood)

Although radios were still an add-on, hanging beneath the dashboard, speakers could be accommodated in the cubby-hole space on the driver's side. Also note the pod for the overdrive switch and, for the first time on an XK, the brake fluid/handbrake warning lamp. (Courtesy Tom Wood)

Still an XK interior but more modern and airy. The same dashboard treatment applied to all variants from here onwards. This example is a later car with the centrally mounted ashtray. (Courtesy Tom Wood)

Those cars fitted with overdrive were equipped with a switch at the far end of the facia area, fitted to a somewhat 'add-on' looking upholstered plinth. Those cars fitted with the Borg-Warner automatic transmission had the Bakelite quadrant fitted under the centre of the dashboard.

Door trim style was much cleaner looking, again with rolled upholstered tops, full-width chrome finisher, and door pockets. Early cars featured trimmed pull-out ashtrays, *à la* Mark VII saloon. The substantial door-pulls acted as armrests as well. (They were straight from the Wilmot Breeden parts bin and also to be found on such vehicles as the old Morris FG truck!) The same 'slider' type of door handles were used as found on the XK140 fixed-head.

The seating took the same style as the XK140 although it was altered subtly. New squabs were used for the drophead and the fixed-head and under the upholstery the frames were of different construction. The occasional rear seating was also changed slightly in style but was now

exactly the same for both models. The floor layout and carpets were like the previous model and the rear opening to the boot area was similar.

All the above, except where indicated, related to both the fixed-head and drophead models. The latter still had the quick-action lined hood in a similar style to the previous model. When erect, it didn't look quite as 'clean' (and was more cumbersome) as the XK140 and when down, it still stood predominantly proud at the back, restricting rearward vision somewhat. The rear window was marginally larger.

New door panels retained the sliders from the XK140 but were much better finished and, for the first time, had armrests/door pulls. (Courtesy Tom Wood)

Interior accommodation of the XK150 fixed-head was plush with slightly modified occasional rear seating but still retained the neat lidded area to gain access to the boot. (Courtesy Tom Wood)

The XK150 drophead coupé, for many, doesn't show off the new body style to its best advantage. The hood sits particularly proud at the rear, making for a very heavy looking car overall. (Courtesy Tom Wood)

In the boot area there were only minor changes from the XK140. A cut-out in the boot lid trim allowed the light from the number-plate nacelle to shine through as illumination. The boot lid was initially supported by a telescopic arm on the left-hand side, again similar to the big saloon.

Both cars came out slightly heavier than the previous models at just over 1cwt more.

Two versions of the XK150 were announced, in both fixed-head and drophead forms: the standard model and the SE. However, the majority of cars supplied were SE models. These cars featured, as standard equipment, items such as wire wheels, disc brakes, the B-type cylinder head, and windscreen washers.

A beautifully restored drophead coupé with the optional extra leaping mascot on the bonnet. (Courtesy Author)

Original Jaguar publicity picture of a drophead coupé with body-coloured wire wheels and whitewall tyres, an interesting combination. (Courtesy Jaguar Cars Ltd)

What the XK150 cost in 1957

At launch, despite all the changes and the big improvement with the fitment of disc brakes, prices were very close to the outgoing XK140 models. Indeed there was a mere £35 differential in the basic price of the standard models, with SE variants costing just £46 more.

Model: Fixed-head coupé
- Basic: £1,175
- Purchase tax: £588 17s 0d
- Total in UK: £1,763 17s 0d

Model: Fixed-head coupé Automatic
- Basic: £1,303
- Purchase tax: £652 17s 0d
- Total in UK: £1,955 17s 0d

Model: Fixed-head coupé SE
- Basic: £1,292
- Purchase tax: £647 7s 0d
- Total in UK: £1,939 7s 0d

Model: Fixed-head coupé SE Automatic
- Basic: £1,420
- Purchase tax: £711 7s 0d
- Total in UK: £2,131 7s 0d

Model: Drophead coupé
- Basic: £1,195
- Purchase tax: £598 17s 0d
- Total in UK: £1,793 17s 0d

Model: Drophead coupé Automatic
- Basic: £1,323
- Purchase tax: £662 17s 0d
- Total in UK: £1,985 17s 0d

Model: Drophead coupé SE
- Basic: £1,312
- Purchase tax: £657 7s 0d
- Total in UK: £1,969 7s 0d

Model: Drophead coupé SE Automatic
- Basic: £1,440

Purchase tax: £721 7s 0d
Total in UK: £2,161 7s 0d

The extra cost for overdrive on the manual transmission cars was £45 (£67 10s 0d inclusive of purchase tax).

Colour schemes

Some amendments took place with the changeover from XK140 to XK150, the complete range for the latter being:

Exterior: Black
Fixed-head Interior: Red, Tan, Grey or Biscuit
Drophead Interior: Red, Tan, Grey or Biscuit
Hood: Black or Sand
Exterior: Mist Grey
Fixed-head Interior: Red, Light Blue or Dark Blue
Drophead Interior: Red, Light Blue or Dark Blue
Hood: French Grey or Black
Exterior: Sherwood Green
Fixed-head Interior: Tan or Suede Green
Drophead Interior: Tan or Suede Green
Hood: French Grey or Black
Exterior: Pearl Grey
Fixed-head Interior: Red, Light Blue, Dark Blue or Grey
Drophead Interior: Red, Light Blue, Dark Blue or Grey
Hood: Blue, Black or French Grey
Exterior: Red
Fixed-head Interior: Red
Drophead Interior: Red
Hood: Black or Fawn
Exterior: Old English White
Fixed-head Interior: Red
Drophead Interior: Red, Dark Blue or Light Blue
Hood: Fawn, Blue or Black
Exterior: Indigo Blue
Fixed-head Interior: Light Blue, Dark Blue or Grey

Drophead Interior: Light Blue, Dark Blue or Grey
Hood: Blue or Black

Exterior: Claret
Fixed-head Interior: Red
Drophead Interior: Red
Hood: Black

Exterior: Cotswold Blue
Fixed-head Interior: Dark Blue or Grey
Drophead Interior: Dark Blue or Grey
Hood: Blue or Black

Exterior: Carmen Red
Fixed-head Interior: Red
Drophead Interior: Red
Hood: Black

Exterior: British Racing Green
Fixed-head Interior: Tan or Suede Green
Drophead Interior: Tan or Suede Green
Hood: Gunmetal or Black

Exterior: Cornish Grey
Fixed-head Interior: Red, Light Blue, Dark Blue or Grey
Drophead Interior: Red, Light Blue, Dark Blue or Grey
Hood: French Grey or Black

Exterior: Imperial Maroon
Fixed-head Interior: Red
Drophead Interior: Red
Hood: Sand

Optional extras for your XK150

Radio (various installations)
Bucket seats
Sump protection shield
Wing mirrors
Chromed Rimbellishers for steel wheels
Whitewall tyres
Sundym tined windscreen
Leaping Jaguar bonnet mascot (with replacement chrome bonnet strips)

Chromed passenger grab handle for facia
Wing mirrors
Lucas fog and spot lamps
Chromed badge bar
Windscreen washers (standard model only)
Boot lid luggage retainer
Whitewall tyres
Dunlop racing tyres
Wire wheels (painted or chromed finish)
Thornton Powr-Lok limited slip differential

The XK150 actually received more publicity attention than either the XK120 or XK140 through the motoring media. Examples of period car magazines show the extent of coverage in promoting products associated with the car or from Jaguar itself. (Author's collection)

Apprentices from the Jaguar factory with a model during a photo-shoot with the XK150 when new. (Courtesy Jaguar Cars Ltd)

A press comment

The Autocar summed it up very well to the point that Jaguar used these quotes in some of its advertising during this period: 'Their [Jaguar] cars have always been remarkable for quality and performance…once again this is evident in the XK150.'

The Jaguar XK150 and its rivals in 1957

Hardtops/coupés

Make and Model: AC Aceca (Bristol engine)

Top speed: 117mph
0-60mph: 9.0sec
Standing ¼-mile: 16.8sec
Fuel consumption: 19mpg
Price inc tax: £2,497

Make and Model: Alfa Romeo 1900 Super Sprint

Top speed: 112mph
0-60mph: 11.8sec
Standing ¼-mile: 18.4sec
Fuel consumption: –
Price inc tax: £3,676

Make and Model: Aston Martin DB Mark III
Top speed: 119mph
0-60mph: 9.3sec
Standing ¼-mile: 17.4sec
Fuel consumption: 18mpg
Price inc tax: £3,076

Make and Model: Jaguar XK150 SE fixed-head
Top speed: 123mph
0-60mph: 8.5sec
Standing ¼-mile: 16.9sec
Fuel consumption: 20mpg
Price inc tax: £1,939

Make and Model: Jensen 541 Interceptor
Top speed: 124mph
0-60mph: 10.6sec
Standing ¼-mile: 17.5sec
Fuel consumption: 18mpg
Price inc tax: £2,701

Make and Model: Lancia Aurelia GT
Top speed: 112mph
0-60mph: 12.3sec
Standing ¼-mile: 19.1sec
Fuel consumption: 17mpg
Price inc tax: £3,346

Make and Model: Mercedes-Benz 300SL
Top speed: 135mph
0-60mph: 8.8sec
Standing ¼-mile: 16.1sec
Fuel consumption: 18mpg
Price inc tax: £4,651

Make and Model: MG MGA coupé

Top speed: 102mph
0-60mph: 15.0sec
Standing ¼-mile: 19.3sec
Fuel consumption: 25mpg
Price inc tax: £1,087

Make and Model: Porsche 356 fixed-head
Top speed: 102mph
0-60mph: 14.0sec
Standing ¼-mile: 19.5sec
Fuel consumption: 29mpg
Price inc tax: £1,996

Make and Model: Triumph TR3 hardtop
Top speed: 102mph
0-60mph: 12.5sec
Standing ¼-mile: 18.7sec
Fuel consumption: 25mpg
Price inc tax: £1,073

Roadsters

Make and Model: AC Ace (Bristol engine)
Top speed: 119mph
0-60mph: 9.0sec
Standing ¼-mile: 16.8sec
Fuel consumption: 22mpg
Price inc tax: £2,011

Make and Model: Alfa Romeo Giulietta
Top speed: 122mph
0-60mph: 11.2sec
Standing ¼-mile: 17.8sec
Fuel consumption: 29mpg
Price inc tax: £2,348

Make and Model: Allard Palm Beach (Jaguar engine)
Top speed: 120mph
0-60mph: 9.6sec
Standing ¼-mile: 17.1sec
Fuel consumption: –
Price inc tax: £1,951

Make and Model: Austin-Healey 100-Six
Top speed: 107mph
0-60mph: 11.2sec
Standing ¼-mile: 18.5sec
Fuel consumption: 22mpg
Price inc tax: £1,144
Make and Model: BMW 507
Top speed: 124mph
0-60mph: 9.5sec
Standing ¼-mile: –
Fuel consumption: –
Price inc tax: £4,201
Make and Model: Jaguar XK150 3.4 drophead
Top speed: 123mph
0-60mph: 8.5sec
Standing ¼-mile: 16.9sec
Fuel consumption: 20mpg
Price inc tax: £1,794
Make and Model: Lancia Aurelia 2500
Top speed: 111mph
0-60mph: 12.3sec
Standing ¼-mile: 19.1sec
Fuel consumption: 19mpg
Price inc tax: £3,346
Make and Model: Mercedes-Benz 190SL
Top speed: 105mph
0-60mph: 12.0sec
Standing ¼-mile: 17.8sec
Fuel consumption: 24mpg
Price inc tax: £2,896
Make and Model: MG MGA
Top speed: 98mph
0-60mph: 15.6sec
Standing ¼-mile: 20.2sec
Fuel consumption: 27mpg
Price inc tax: £996

Make and Model: Porsche 356 Super cabriolet
Top speed: 120mph
0-60mph: 13.2sec
Standing ¼-mile: 18.7sec
Fuel consumption: 24mpg
Price inc tax: £2,236
Make and Model: Triumph TR3
Top speed: 103mph
0-60mph: 11.9sec
Standing ¼-mile: 18.7sec
Fuel consumption: 25mpg
Price inc tax: £1,021

Things were hotting up on the sports car scene. Strategically important cars compared to the XK150 were the Aston Martin DB Mark III with its 178bhp engine, revised frontal appearance, and front disc brakes. The Jensen's performance had also been enhanced to provide up to 150bhp. The big Mercedes-Benz, originally only available as a coupé with gullwing doors, now came as a handsome convertible, later with a separate hardtop. Then the little MGA had proved immensely popular taking a big slice of the US market for British sports cars.

However, the XK150 had arrived, was well received, and was still highly competitive. In future, though, it would have to survive on its own merits as by this time Jaguar had pulled out of racing officially and was working on some entirely new models for the start of the 1960s.

Specifications: Jaguar XK150

ENGINE

Description

In-line twin overhead camshaft six-cylinder with chromed cast-iron block, aluminium cylinder head. Duplex chain-driven twin overhead camshafts operating valves via bucket tappets. Hemispherical combustion chambers. Aluminium alloy pistons with chromium-plated top rings, EN16 steel connecting rods. Seven-bearing crankshaft with sludge traps

Capacity

3,442cc (210cu in)

Bore and stroke
83mm x 106mm (3.27in x 4.17in)

Compression ratio
8.0:1 (optional 7.0:1, 9.0:1)

Maximum power
190bhp (gross) @ 5,500rpm
SE 210bhp (gross) @ 5,500rpm

Maximum torque
210lb ft (285Nm) @ 2,500rpm
SE 216lb ft (293Nm) @ 3,000rpm

Carburettors
Twin SU 1¾in H6

TRANSMISSION
Gearbox
Moss four-speed with synchromesh on top three gears. Optional Laycock-de Normanville overdrive on top gear. Optional Borg-Warner DG three-speed automatic gearbox on drophead or fixed-head coupé models only

Ratios
1st: 2.98:1 (Manual)/2.30:1(Automatic)
2nd: 1.75:1 (Manual)/1.43:1(Automatic)
3rd: 1.21:1 (Manual)/ – (Automatic)
Top: 1.00:1 (Manual)/1.00:1(Automatic)
(Overdrive): 0.78:1 (Manual)/ – (Automatic)
Reverse: 2.98:1 (Manual)/2.30:1(Automatic)

Clutch
Borg & Beck, 10in single dry plate

Propshaft

Hardy Spicer, needle roller bearings

Rear axle
Salisbury 4HA hypoid bevel, ratio 3.54:1 (optional 3.31:1, 4.09:1, 4.27:1), with overdrive 4.09:1

BRAKES
Front
Lockheed drum, 12in x 2¼in, two leading shoes. Optional Dunlop disc, 12in (standard on SE)

Rear
Lockheed drum, 12in x 2¼in, single leading shoe. Optional Dunlop disc, 12in (standard on SE)

Operation
Lockheed hydraulic, SE vacuum servo

Handbrake
'Fly-off' lever with cable linkage to rear drums or discs

SUSPENSION
Front
Independent. Double wishbones, torsion bars, telescopic dampers, anti-roll bar

Rear
Live axle, semi-elliptic springs, Girling telescopic dampers

STEERING
System type
Alford & Alder rack and pinion

Number of turns lock to lock
2¾

Turning circle

33ft 0in (10.06m)

Steering wheel
Bluemel four-spoke wood-rim, 17in diameter

WHEELS AND TYRES
5½J x 16in steel disc wheels, optional (standard on SE) 5J x 16in painted or chromed wire wheels

Tyres
6.00-16in Dunlop Road Speed cross-ply

PERFORMANCE
The Autocar road test of SE overdrive fixed-head coupé, 21 February 1958

Top speed
123mph (198kph)

Acceleration
0–50mph (80kph): 6.5sec
0–60mph (96kph): 8.5sec
0–70mph (112kph): 11.4sec
0–80mph (128kph): 15.0sec
0–90mph (144kph): 19.5sec
0–100mph (160kph): 25.1sec
Standing quarter mile (402m): 16.9sec

Fuel consumption
20.5mpg (13.78l/100km)

DIMENSIONS
Length
14ft 9in (4,496mm)

Width
5ft 4½in (1,638mm)

Height
Fixed-head and drophead coupés 4ft 7in (1,397mm)
Roadster 4ft 4½in (1,334mm)

Wheelbase
8ft 6in (2,591mm)

Track
Front: 4ft 3¼in (1,302mm)
Rear: 4ft 3¼in (1,302mm)

Ground clearance
7⅛in (181mm)

Weight (dry)
Fixed-head coupé 3,220lb (1,460kg)
Drophead coupé 3,220lb (1,460kg)
Roadster 3,158lb (1,433kg)

A broader look to the front, the most prominent changes being the grille, bonnet and one-piece windscreen. (Courtesy Tom Wood)

This view emphasises the restricted view with the hood down. This example is a later car with larger rear lights. (Courtesy Tom Wood)

With the hood up, the XK150 drophead coupé did not look quite as clean as its XK140 predecessor. (Courtesy Tom Wood)

1958–1961
XK model expansion

The future looked brighter than ever for the British car industry. Along with two reductions in the bank lending rate in 1958, all restrictions on hire purchase were removed and the price of petrol came down. Production rose and sales increased both in the home market and abroad, for although exports to North America had dipped, cars going to other countries in Europe had increased. Nevertheless, overall the UK manufacturers' grip on the US market had halved since 1950 with emerging producers from Germany and other European countries taking a larger share of the business.

The Roadster arrives

It was unusual that only two variants of the XK150 had been launched when there had been three previously. This was perhaps for several reasons: the 1957 factory fire, preparing the 3.4-litre saloon, or just the final development of the Roadster delaying its launch.

The Roadster was announced in March 1958 and for many has to be the most attractive of the XK150 variants. It attained greater attributes in terms of practicality and modernity compared to the earlier Roadsters. The launch of this car came with another option, a more powerful engine (just for the Roadster initially).

For many, the XK150 Roadster is the most attractive of the XK150 variants. (Courtesy Tom Wood)

The Jaguar stand at the 1958 Amsterdam Motor Show with the then new XK150 drophead and fixed-head coupés and the new Mark VIII saloon. Behind are the 2.4- and 3.4-litre saloons. (Courtesy Jaguar Cars Ltd)

Overall, the lines of the new XK150 Roadster were clean and smooth. (Courtesy Tom Wood)

Forward of the scuttle, the Roadster was exactly the same as the other XK150 models except that as less space was required inside the car (strictly

a two-seater), the scuttle and windscreen were moved back 4in, which necessitated a longer bonnet.

In common with the earlier Roadsters the doors were also a different pressing from the other cars. With a neat and far less sculptured look to their tops, the doors were fitted with a chromed finisher. For the first time on a Roadster, Jaguar offered proper wind-up glass windows, curved at the rear edges to accommodate the hood and with their own attached chromium-plated surrounds. There were no front quarterlights but this Roadster did have exterior door handles and locks.

At the rear the styling followed the same theme as the existing XK150s but gave the appearance of a long, low sloping rear deck; as there were no occasional seats to accommodate the steel tonneau panel was extended forward to just behind the seat backs. This longer rear deck looked most attractive when the hood was down.

Internally the only differences from the other XK150 models were the lack of occasional rear seating, a slight style change to the seat backs, and the movement of the rear body area bringing it further forward towards the seats (as mentioned above). The door trims were the same as the drophead's although the shaping at the top differed. The Roadster was the only model not to be fitted with sun visors.

New door pressings with a smart chrome finisher and, at last on an XK Roadster, lockable doors! (Courtesy Tom Wood)

No rear seating for the Roadster model but still some storage space. (Courtesy Tom Wood)

By comparison, the quite comfortable (but still occasional) seating suited the drophead, particularly with the roof down. (Courtesy Author)

The XK150 Roadster looked particularly attractive from the rear with its long 'deck' area. (Courtesy Tom Wood)

Changes in style between the XK140 Roadster (left) and the XK150 version are apparent in this rear view. (Courtesy Author)

Smooth styling of the Roadster is shown here to its best advantage. (Courtesy Tom Wood)

The hood and its frame were entirely different from the XK140, the most notable aspect being the much larger rear window and the much neater, natural look with the hood erect. This soft-top was also easier to manipulate and, when folded, a neat upholstered cover snapped into position over the hood, sealing the area between the seat backs and the rear deck of the car.

With the introduction of the Roadster all XK150 models acquired a

steering column-mounted stalk to operate the indicators, although initially they were not self-cancelling.

For the Roadster spring-loaded boot hinges were adopted, eliminating the need for the telescopic boot lid stay. This change was adopted for all XK150 models from November 1958, although these were again modified in 1959 to ensure the boot was supported properly in the open position.

For the first time an XK Roadster looked really attractive with the hood erect and with proper glass side windows as well! (Courtesy Tom Wood)

The underfloor area in the XK150's boot, showing the spare wheel and comprehensive toolkit. (Courtesy Tom Wood)

More power for the Roadster

At the New York Motor Show in April 1958, British exhibitors showed 110 models. Star of the show, of course, was Jaguar. It commented: 'The American recession just does not exist as far as we are concerned.' Only three of its 600 buyers in the past nine months had asked for hire purchase terms and the new XK150 Roadster was selling at the rate of one per hour.

The even bigger news, however, was the announcement of an uprated engine, initially only available for this Roadster model. The truth of the matter is that the XK had become progressively heavier and its performance was falling back as the car aged. Its performance had to be revitalised to keep the car competitive.

So the existing XK 3.4-litre engine was fitted with a new cylinder head, designed by well-known automobile engineer Harry Weslake, who had worked on many projects before with Jaguar. This new head would become commonly known as the 'straight-port head' because of the straightening of

the ports to improve the mixture flow. To make the most of this advantage, the manifolding and intakes were redesigned and the carburettors were not only increased in size from 1¾in to 2in diameter (SU HD8 type) but there were now three of them.

Modifications were made to the engine to handle the increased horsepower. The standard compression ratio was raised to 9:1 and the bearings were made of lead bronze; a lightened flywheel and a beefed-up clutch all helped, along with twin fuel pumps. These alterations provided a good boost in output over the SE model with the B-type cylinder head.

XK150 3.4-litre power outputs

Engine: Standard engine
Bhp (gross): 190 @ 5,500rpm
Torque: 210lb ft @ 2,500rpm
Engine: SE (B-type head)
Bhp (gross): 210 @ 5,500rpm
Torque: 216lb ft @ 3,000rpm
Engine: S (straight-port head)
Bhp (gross): 250 @ 5,500rpm
Torque: 240lb ft @ 4,500rpm

The 'S' engine installation with triple SU carburettors. In this case a 3.8-litre version (see later). (Courtesy Tom Wood)

The new model was known as the XK150 'S' and at the time of launch the new 3.4-litre 'S' model was available only in Roadster form and initially was intended for the export market. The price quoted at the time was $5,020, compared with the equivalent SE model at $4,660 with overdrive. It was not possible to buy an 'S' model with automatic transmission.

Externally the only identification to show the car was one of the more powerful variants was by the fitment of a chromed 'S' attached to the top forward edge of each door. Most 'S' models that were equipped with overdrive had the operating switch repositioned to the transmission tunnel area in the form of a stubby control lever.

Another advance came in November 1958 and affected all XK150 models: the adoption of bridge-type calipers with quick-change square brake pads. This meant that it was no longer necessary to strip down the wheel cylinders and then bleed the brakes upon reassembly, a major move forward in service terms.

It wasn't until October 1958 that the XK150 Roadster was listed as a

model available in the UK, and coinciding with this the ‘S’ specification engine became available at an extra cost for all XK150 models. By this time Jaguar had also stated that disc brakes were a standard fitment, although in practice no cars had apparently ever been ordered without them from the beginning!

The only external identification for an ‘S’ model was the chrome insignia on each door. (Courtesy Tom Wood)

What the XK150 cost in 1959

By the end of 1958 purchase tax had been reduced, dropping the home market prices for all XK150 models, which became on average £100 cheaper than previously. The price list included the ‘S’ models that were now available in the UK.

Model: Fixed-head coupé

Basic: £1,175

Purchase tax: £490 14s 2d

Total in UK: £1,665 14s 2d

Model: Fixed-head coupé SE

Basic: £1,292

Purchase tax: £539 9s 2d
Total in UK: £1,831 9s 2d
Model: Fixed-head coupé SE Overdrive
Basic: £1,337
Purchase tax: £538 4s 2d
Total in UK: £1,895 4s 2d
Model: Fixed-head coupé SE Automatic
Basic: £1,420
Purchase tax: £592 15s 10d
Total in UK: £2,012 15s 10d
Model: Fixed-head coupé ‘S’ Overdrive
Basic: £1,457
Purchase tax: £608 4s 2d
Total in UK: £2,065 4s 2d
Model: Drophead coupé
Basic: £1,195
Purchase tax: £499 0s 10d
Total in UK: £1,694 0s 10d
Model: Drophead coupé SE
Basic: £1,312
Purchase tax: £547 15s 10d
Total in UK: £1,859 15s 10d
Model: Drophead coupé SE Overdrive
Basic: £1,357
Purchase tax: £566 10s 10d
Total in UK: £1,923 10s 10d
Model: Drophead coupé SE Automatic
Basic: £1,440
Purchase tax: £601 2s 6d
Total in UK: £2,041 2s 6d
Model: Drophead coupé ‘S’ Overdrive
Basic: £1,477
Purchase tax: £616 10s 10d
Total in UK: £2,093 10s 10d
Model: Roadster
Basic: £1,175

Purchase tax: £490 41s 2d
Total in UK: £1,665 14s 2d
Model: Roadster SE
Basic: £1,292
Purchase tax: £539 9s 2d
Total in UK: £1,831 9s 2d
Model: Roadster SE Overdrive
Basic: £1,337
Purchase tax: £558 4s 2d
Total in UK: £1,895 4s 2d
Model: Roadster SE Automatic
Basic: £1,420
Purchase tax: £592 15s 10d
Total in UK: £2,012 15s 10d
Model: Roadster ‘S’ Overdrive
Basic: £1,457
Purchase tax: £608 4s 2d
Total in UK: £2,065 4s 2d

What the new 3.8-litre models cost

Model: Fixed-head SE
Basic: £1,370
Purchase tax: £571 19s 2d
Total in UK: £1,941 19s 2d
Model: Fixed-head SE Overdrive
Basic: £1,415
Purchase tax: £590 14s 2d
Total in UK: £2,005 14s 2d
Model: Fixed-head SE Automatic
Basic: £1,498
Purchase tax: £625 5s 10d
Total in UK: £2,123 5s 10d
Model: Fixed-head SE ‘S’ Overdrive
Basic: £1,535
Purchase tax: £640 14s 2d
Total in UK: £2,175 14s 2d

Model: Drophead SE
Basic: £1,390
Purchase tax: £580 5s 10d
Total in UK: £1,970 5s 10d
Model: Drophead SE Overdrive
Basic: £1,435
Purchase tax: £599 0s 10d
Total in UK: £2,034 0s 10d
Model: Drophead SE Automatic
Basic: £1,518
Purchase tax: £633 12s 6d
Total in UK: £2,151 12s 6d
Model: Drophead SE 'S' Overdrive
Basic: £1,555
Purchase tax: £649 0s 10d
Total in UK: £2,204 0s 10d
Model: Roadster SE
Basic: £1,370
Purchase tax: £517 19s 2d
Total in UK: £1,941 19s 2d
Model: Roadster SE Overdrive
Basic: £1,415
Purchase tax: £590 14s 2d
Total in UK: £2,005 14s 2d
Model: Roadster SE Automatic
Basic: £1,498
Purchase tax: £625 5s 10d
Total in UK: £2,123 5s 10d
Model: Roadster SE 'S' Overdrive
Basic: £1,535
Purchase tax: £640 14s 2d
Total in UK: £2,175 14s 2d

All 3.8-litre models were fitted with a 3.31:1 or 4.27:1 Thornton Powr-Lok differential as standard equipment. The above prices remained in force throughout the remainder of the XK150's lifespan.

How the XK150 performed

Figures taken from contemporary road tests for fixed-head models

3.4-litre SE
- Top speed: 123mph
- 0-50mph: 6.5sec
- 0-100mph: 25.2sec
- Standing ¼-mile: 16.9sec

3.4-litre 'S'
- Top speed: 132mph
- 0-50mph: 6.1sec
- 0-100mph: 20.3sec
- Standing ¼-mile: 16.2sec

3.8-litre 'S'
- Top speed: 136mph
- 0-50mph: 6.2sec
- 0-100mph: 19.0sec
- Standing ¼-mile: 16.0sec

Even bigger engines

Jaguar had announced a larger 3.8-litre version of the XK engine for the revamped saloon, the Mark IX, launched at the British Motor Show in October 1958. It was inevitable that this bigger engine would power other models and at the 1959 British Motor Show Jaguar showed them all: the new Mark 2 saloon and the same engine in all three variants of the XK150. Not only that but the 3.8-litre engine would also be available in both SE (B-type cylinder head with twin 1¾in SU carburettors) and 'S' models (straight-port cylinder head with triple 2in carburettors).

The capacity of 3.8 litres (3,781cc) was achieved by increasing the bore from 83mm to 87mm. For safety reasons this necessitated the fitment of dry liners to the bores and, to counteract potential cooling problems, additional water passages were drilled into the block. Carburation and manifolding remained the same and the rest of the power train was unchanged.

It is worth comparing the specification differences between all the XK150 engines available at this time:

Engine: 3.4-litre (standard)
Bhp (gross): 190 @ 5,500rpm
Torque: 210lb ft @ 2,500rpm
Engine: 3.4-litre SE
Bhp (gross): 210 @ 5,500rpm
Torque: 216lb ft @ 3,000rpm
Engine: 3.4- litre 'S'
Bhp (gross): 250 @ 5,500rpm
Torque: 240lb ft @ 4,500rpm
Engine: 3.8-litre
Bhp (gross): 220 @ 5,500rpm
Torque: 240lb ft @ 3,000rpm
Engine: 3.8-litre 'S'
Bhp (gross): 265 @ 5,500rpm
Torque: 260lb ft @ 4,000rpm

The huge 105bhp power increase of the 3.8-litre unit compared with the original 3.4-litre engine in the XK120 (160bhp @ 5,100rpm) is testament to the soundness of the XK engine's original design.

Production changes

In December 1958 the door-mounted ashtrays were replaced by a single chromed ashtray mounted on the transmission tunnel ahead of the gear lever, another common item fitted to many other cars such as MGs.

In late 1959 the rear lamp clusters were changed, utilising the same lenses and bulb holders as the Mark IX saloon but with, by necessity, much deeper chrome surrounds. The changes provided separate reflectors and indicator lenses to suit changing legislation.

The handbrake was repositioned on these later cars. Up to this time it had been 'handed' to the passenger side of the transmission tunnel according to whether the car was left- or right-hand drive. From then onwards the handbrake remained on the right-hand side regardless of the driver's position.

The later 3.8-litre 'S' model with the unusual overdrive control ahead of the gear lever and the single ashtray on the transmission tunnel. (Courtesy Tom Wood)

New, larger rear lamp clusters were fitted to all XKs from 1959, changed to meet legislation and applying to the large saloons at the same time although the chromed plinths were not interchangeable. (Courtesy Tom Wood)

The interior of a very late Roadster model showing the repositioned handbrake on the right-hand side. (Courtesy Tom Wood)

What the press thought of the XK150

It was September 1959 when *The Autocar* got hold of a 3.4-litre XK150 'S' and the magazine was very impressed with the continual development of the model by Jaguar. The improved performance had not hindered the flexibility or the smoothness of the car at all and the testers were amazed to find that they could run the car from rest to 100mph, using top gear *only*, in an incredible 33.5sec.

They complimented the XK's 'never-fade' brakes and the benefit of the Powr-Lok differential. However, the poor handbrake, synchromesh of the old Moss gearbox, and the stiff accelerator pedal (resulting in jerky starts) were criticised. The seats also came in for comment for their lack of lateral support. However, the test finished by saying: 'the XK150S is a superlatively satisfying way to travel on the open road'.

Christopher Jennings, editor of *The Motor*, took an XK150 'S' 3.8-litre fixed-head coupé to Scotland in 1960, leaving London and driving up the M1 motorway for the first time since it opened. At speed, three-quarter

throttle in overdrive, he recalled six years earlier in Germany having to drive a racing C-type to get the same performance and agility.

The travel-stained XK150 'S' 3.8 pauses in front of the Commando Memorial near Spean Bridge during the epic trip to Scotland in 1960 (see text). (Courtesy The Motor magazine)

Christopher Jennings found this XK150 'S' 3.8-litre fixed-head coupé a great touring car (see text). (Courtesy The Motor magazine)

Later, on the run to Inverness from Glasgow that he found the most enjoyable, he reported 'the Jaguar ghosting along in a way which was peaceful but produced quite sensational hourly averages'. The only mechanical incident involved a leaking exhaust manifold flange gasket, easily replaced during lunch.

His return journey (via Wales!) covered 537 miles in one stint from breakfast and after leaving Wales on the following day he drove another 228 miles back to London (in 1960!).

His comments about the car included uncertainty about the Powr-Lok differential; ideal in certain conditions but on one occasion, on full acceleration in third gear, a patch of mud caused the car to 'wag its tail' more fiercely than anything he had previously encountered. He also criticised the headlamps as unsuitable for a car of this performance. However, in the areas of roadholding, brakes, and steering, he felt the car combined 'the essential merits of security and speed at a price which remains a source of envy and amazement to other makes'.

The Jaguar XK150 and its rivals in 1960

Make and Model: AC Greyhound

Top speed: 107mph
0-60mph: 11.4sec
Standing ¼-mile: 19.1sec
Fuel consumption: 19mpg
Price inc tax: £2,999

Make and Model: Allard GT
Top speed: 120mph
0-60mph: 9.6sec
Standing ¼-mile: 17.1sec
Fuel consumption: 19mpg
Price inc tax: £2,409

Make and Model: Alvis TD21
Top speed: 105mph
0-60mph: 13.5sec
Standing ¼-mile: 19.4sec
Fuel consumption: 20mph
Price inc tax: £2,827

Make and Model: Aston Martin DB4
Top speed: 141mph
0-60mph: 8.5sec
Standing ¼-mile: 16.1sec
Fuel consumption: 15mpg
Price inc tax: £3,962

Make and Model: Austin-Healey 3000
Top speed: 116mph
0-60mph: 11.7sec
Standing ¼-mile: 17.7sec
Fuel consumption: 21mpg
Price inc tax: £1,168

Make and Model: Daimler SP250
Top speed: 122mph
0-60mph: 10.2sec
Standing ¼-mile: 17.8sec
Fuel consumption: 29mpg
Price inc tax: £1,395

Make and Model: Ferrari 250GT Berlinetta

Top speed: 127mph
0-60mph: 6.4sec
Standing ¼-mile: 14.4sec
Fuel consumption: 15mpg
Price inc tax: £6,326

Make and Model: Jaguar XK150 ‘S’ 3.4 fixed-head
Top speed: 136mph
0-60mph: 7.8sec
Standing ¼-mile: 16.2sec
Fuel consumption: 15mpg
Price inc tax: £2,065

Make and Model: Jaguar 3.4 Mark 2 saloon o/d
Top speed: 120mph
0-60mph: 11.9sec
Standing ¼-mile: 19.1sec
Fuel consumption: 16mpg
Price inc tax: £1,643

Make and Model: Jensen 541S (automatic)
Top speed: 109mph
0-60mph: 12.4sec
Standing ¼-mile: 18.8sec
Fuel consumption: 15mpg
Price inc tax: £3,196

Make and Model: Lotus Elite
Top speed: 119mph
0-60mph: 11.1sec
Standing ¼-mile: 17.5sec
Fuel consumption: 30mpg
Price inc tax: £1,949

Make and Model: TVR Grantura (Climax)
Top speed: 101mph
0-60mph: 10.8sec
Standing ¼-mile: 18.3sec
Fuel consumption: –
Price inc tax: £1,431

Final colour schemes for the XK150 range

Exterior: Black
- Interior Fixed-head: Red, Tan or Grey
- Interior Drophead: Red, Tan or Grey
- Interior Roadster: Red
- Hood: Black or Sand

Exterior: Mist Grey
- Interior Fixed-head: Red, Light Blue, Dark Blue or Grey
- Interior Drophead: Red, Light Blue, Dark Blue or Grey
- Interior Roadster: Red, Light Blue, Dark Blue or Grey
- Hood: French Grey or Black

Exterior: Sherwood Green
- Interior Fixed-head: Tan or Suede Green
- Interior Drophead: Tan or Suede Green
- Interior Roadster: Tan or Suede Green
- Hood: French Grey or Black

Exterior: Pearl Grey
- Interior Fixed-head: Red, Light Blue, Dark Blue or Grey
- Interior Drophead: Red, Light Blue, Dark Blue or Grey
- Interior Roadster: Red, Light Blue, Dark Blue or Grey
- Hood: Blue, Black or French Grey

Exterior: Carmine Red
- Interior Fixed-head: Red
- Interior Drophead: Red
- Interior Roadster: Red
- Hood: Black or Fawn

Exterior: Old English White
- Interior Fixed-head: Red
- Interior Drophead: Red, Dark Blue or Light Blue
- Interior Roadster: Red
- Hood: Fawn, Blue or Black

Exterior: Indigo Blue
- Interior Fixed-head: Light Blue, Dark Blue or Grey
- Interior Drophead: Light Blue, Dark Blue or Grey
- Interior Roadster: Light Blue, Dark Blue or Grey
- Hood: Blue or Black

Exterior: Claret
Interior Fixed-head: Red or Maroon
Interior Drophead: Red or Maroon
Interior Roadster: Red or Maroon
Hood: Black or Sand
Exterior: Cotswold Blue
Interior Fixed-head: Dark Blue or Grey
Interior Drophead: Dark Blue or Grey
Interior Roadster: Dark Blue or Grey
Hood: Blue or Black
Exterior: Carmen Red
Interior Fixed-head: Red
Interior Drophead: Red
Interior Roadster: Red
Hood: Black
Exterior: British Racing Green
Interior Fixed-head: Tan or Suede Green
Interior Drophead: Tan or Suede Green
Interior Roadster: Tan or Suede Green
Hood: Gunmetal or Black
Exterior: Cornish Grey
Interior Fixed-head: Red, Light Blue, Dark Blue and Grey
Interior Drophead: Red, Light Blue, Dark Blue or Grey
Interior Roadster: Red, Light Blue, Dark Blue or Grey
Hood: French Grey or Black
Exterior: Imperial Maroon
Interior Fixed-head: Maroon
Interior Drophead: Maroon
Interior Roadster: Maroon
Hood: Black

The Jaguar XKs on paper

Over the years the XKs haven't exactly been endowed with superb brochures and promotional material from the factory. The XK150 wasn't so different either, with a conventional white folder with poorly printed black and white images followed by a larger folder for the Roadster that at least

used some metallic ink on the cover. The XK150 fared even worse overseas with sepia-toned mini-folders.

Promotional literature for the XK150 range! (Author's collection)

At least some component advertisers thought well enough of the XK150 to promote it lavishly like this. (Author's collection)

Nearing the end

By 1960 the XK150 was in the September of its years, the competition from other manufacturers was hotting up, and Jaguar knew it because it was shortly to launch its radical new replacement sports car, the E-type.

By this time Ferrari had the 250GTE, its most successful car up to that time, still powered by a V12 engine but with 2+2 seating and, also from Italy, the £5,852 Maserati 3500GT was a very attractive and modern-looking sports car. The Porsche brand was being updated continually and was becoming more popular as well. On the home front, AC introduced its new Greyhound (another 2+2), there was the bigger-engined Austin-Healey 3000, the new and unusually styled Daimler SP250, and the fabulous Aston Martin DB4.

Despite all this newer competition, the XK150, particularly in its later more powerful form, could still hold its head up high – but time was not on its side.

The XK150 'S' drophead. From this angle one can appreciate the poor rear visibility for the driver when the hood is down. (Courtesy Tom Wood)

February 3, 1960 — The Motor 1

Performance Cars Ltd.

SLeworth 7011 — GREAT WEST ROAD, BRENTFORD, MIDDX. — ISLeworth 7011

OFFICIAL AGENTS FOR AUSTIN-HEALEY, M.G., MORRIS, RILEY AND WOLSELEY

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Selling a car can be a bigger worry than buying one. Quite obviously you want to get the best price possible.

Our demand is always very high for Sports-cars. We make no claims to being the "best buyers", an over-used phrase these days, but if you want a good price for your car offer it to us and you will not be disappointed.

NEW CARS

AUSTIN Healey 3000, 4-str. .. £1,175
MGA, twin cam, 2-str., blue, and black upholstery .. £1,207
MG Mk. III Farina, island green .. £1,207
MORRIS Oxford, all metal traveller .. £957
RILEY 4/68, damask red/white .. £1,045
RILEY 1.5, green with green upholstery £815
WOLSELEY 15/60 Farina, duotone .. £953
WOLSELEY 1500, immac. red upholstery £951

PERFORMANCE CODE

A—reversing light. B—luggage rack. C—"C"-type engine. D—disc brakes. E—dual exhaust. F—fog light. H—heater. M—modifications. (Alexander, Derrington, Speedwell, etc.) O—overdrive. P—spotlights. Q—tonneau cover. R—radio. S—occasional seats. T—hardtop. W—wire wheels. X—Michelin X tyres. 1—one owner. 2—two owners.

Showrooms illuminated all night for viewing.

Cut and post to PERFORMANCE CARS LTD., Great West Road, Brentford, Middx.
I have for outright sale/part exchange a 19 .....
I am interested in a .....
New/Used .....
Name and address below

By the end of the 1950s and into the 1960s there were plenty of used XKs around and they were getting cheaper by the month. (Author's collection)

A rather unusual advertisement for an XK150 from a deceased's estate! (Author's collection)

A second-hand XK

Checking out a few used car prices in *The Motor* and *The Autocar* magazines from 1959–60 revealed the following examples:

1951 XK120 Roadster (spotless) £475; 1955 XK140 SE drophead (two owners) £795; 1957 XK140 fixed-head (one owner) £1,125; 1958 XK150 fixed-head (12,000 miles) £1,545.

By 1961 when the model was nearing the end of production prices had

dropped further:

1951 XK120 Roadster £385; 1954 XK120 drophead £545; 1956 XK140 drophead £665; 1955 XK140 fixed-head £465; 1958 XK150 fixed-head (recon engine) £925; 1960 XK150 3.8 roadster, lots of extras £1,395.

In 1965 the author was offered a rather sad-looking XK120 drophead coupé (that ran) for the princely sum of £15!

XK production 1948–1961

XK120: 12,061
XK140: 8,935
XK150: 9,385
Total: 30,381

The XK legacy

The XK models put Jaguar on the map as far as sports car production was concerned. The range played a vital role in developing Jaguar's export business, proving its reputation for quality, longevity, and performance in competition.

A rare sight, an XK150 fixed-head with disc wheels and full spats pictured at a 1960s club race meeting. (Courtesy Jaguar Daimler Heritage Trust)

Even rarer, an Old English White XK150 Roadster with white roof, whitewall tyres, disc wheels, full spats, and the very rare white steering wheel. (Courtesy Author)

Appendix 1
The XK models: a pictorial comparison

Roadsters

XK120 (Courtesy Tom Wood)

XK140 (Courtesy Tom Wood)

XK150 (Courtesy Tom Wood)

Fixed-head coupés

XK120 (Courtesy Tom Wood)

XK140 (Courtesy Tom Wood)

XK150 (Courtesy Tom Wood)

Drophead coupés

XK120 (Courtesy Tom Wood)

XK140 (Courtesy Tom Wood)

XK150 (Courtesy Tom Wood)

Appendix 2
An XK photo miscellany

Many people have tried to better William Lyons's XK designs. Here are just a few from the 'best of the rest':

E. D. Abbott, coachbuilders from Farnham in the UK, built this one-off aluminium-bodied XK120 in 1950 for a New Zealand customer. It was a four-seater complete with tow bar. (Courtesy The Autocar magazine)

Italian coachbuilder Bertone produced this very attractive XK150 'S'. (Courtesy Author)

Better known for work on Porsche, Beuttler produced this one-off XK120, shown at Geneva in 1952, for a Swiss owner's collection. (Author's collection)

Swiss company Ghia Aigle built this XK120 2+2 Roadster in 1952. (Author's collection)

Very advanced technically, this 1955 Turin Motor Show exhibit from Boano is based on the XK140. (Courtesy The Autocar magazine)

Originating in the US, this is the only known XK120 to be fitted with spare wheels in the front wings. (Author's collection)

Italian coachbuilder Ghia styled this 1954 Paris Motor Show exhibit based on the XK120. (Author's collection)

The 1952 XK120-based Flajole Forefunner, with its fastback styling and removable Perspex roof, was considered the car of the future when it was finally completed in 1955. (Courtesy Roland Urban)

Pininfarina's 1955 Geneva Motor Show exhibit based on an XK120. (Courtesy The Autocar magazine)

This wonderful futuristic vehicle was built around an XK120 but with six carburettors! (Courtesy Author)

There have been so many others, too many to cover in this book, but here are a few more to whet your appetite for other people's interpretations of the XK. (Author's collection)

There have also been so many famous owners of XKs that we could fill a book with pictures of them. Here are just a few:

Robert Stack of The Untouchables TV fame in his XK120 fixed-head. (Courtesy Hulton Archive/Getty Images)

Anita Ekberg sitting on her XK140 Roadster. (Courtesy Gene Lester/Getty Images)

Clint Eastwood in an XK150 Roadster. (Courtesy Hulton Archive/Getty Images)

Gary Cooper in his XK120 Roadster. (Courtesy Photofest)

Comedian Tony Hancock and his wife Cicely beside his XK120 in 1954. (Courtesy Getty Images)

Yet more unusual pictures: everything from greetings cards to toys and graffiti:

XK garage mural! (Author's collection)

Greetings cards, envelopes and stamps, it's all been done on the XK! (Author's collection)

Finally, toys: from pedal cars… (Author's collection)

…to die-casts and slot cars. (Courtesy Author)

Even an XK that tells the time! (Courtesy Author)

Today the XKs are loved and cherished as much as ever. The Jaguar Enthusiasts' Club have resurrected XK racing as it was in the 1950s and then the 1970s with a full Championship Series covering all models, in standard form and modified. (Courtesy Author)

Concours, runs, tours, and major events, like this one at Donington celebrating the first 50 years of the XK, show the enthusiasm and support for the XKs now. (Courtesy Author)

There are still people running unrestored examples. (Courtesy Simon Cronin)

Finally a picture that says it all. In Jaguar's own words from a much later date, 'Some Day, Some Day!' (Courtesy Jaguar Cars Ltd)

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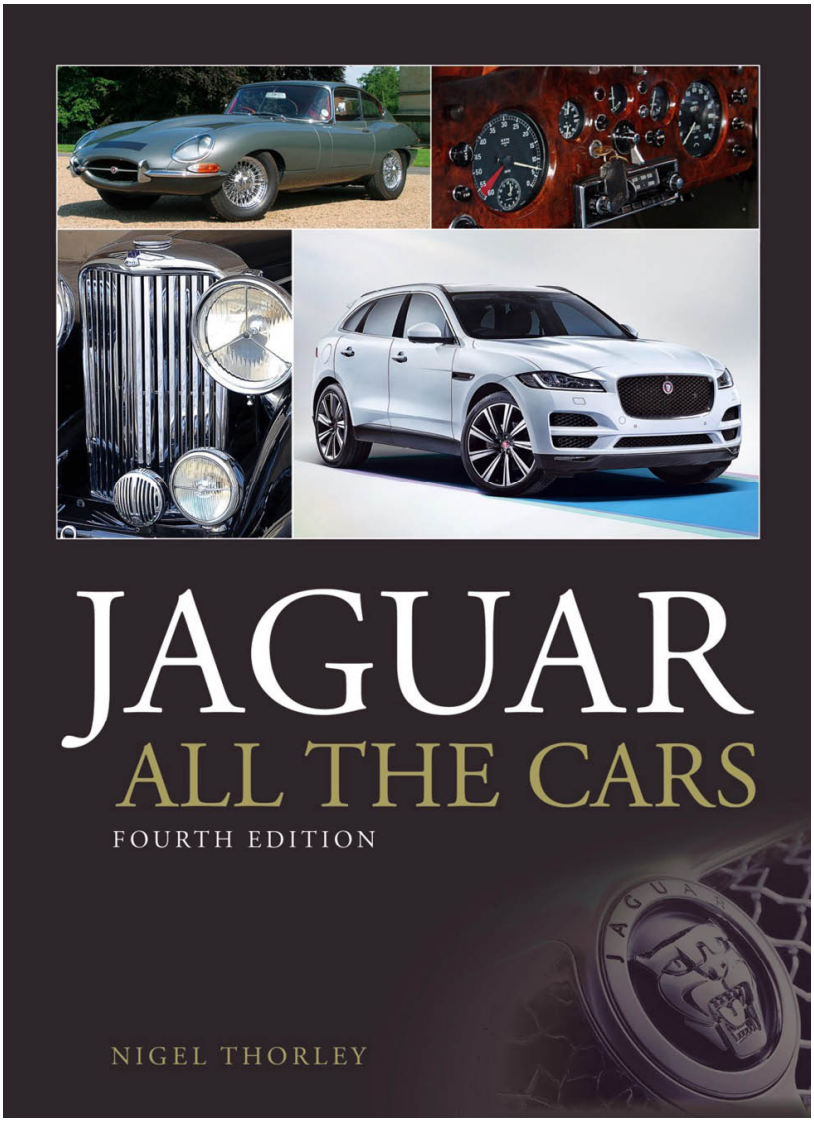

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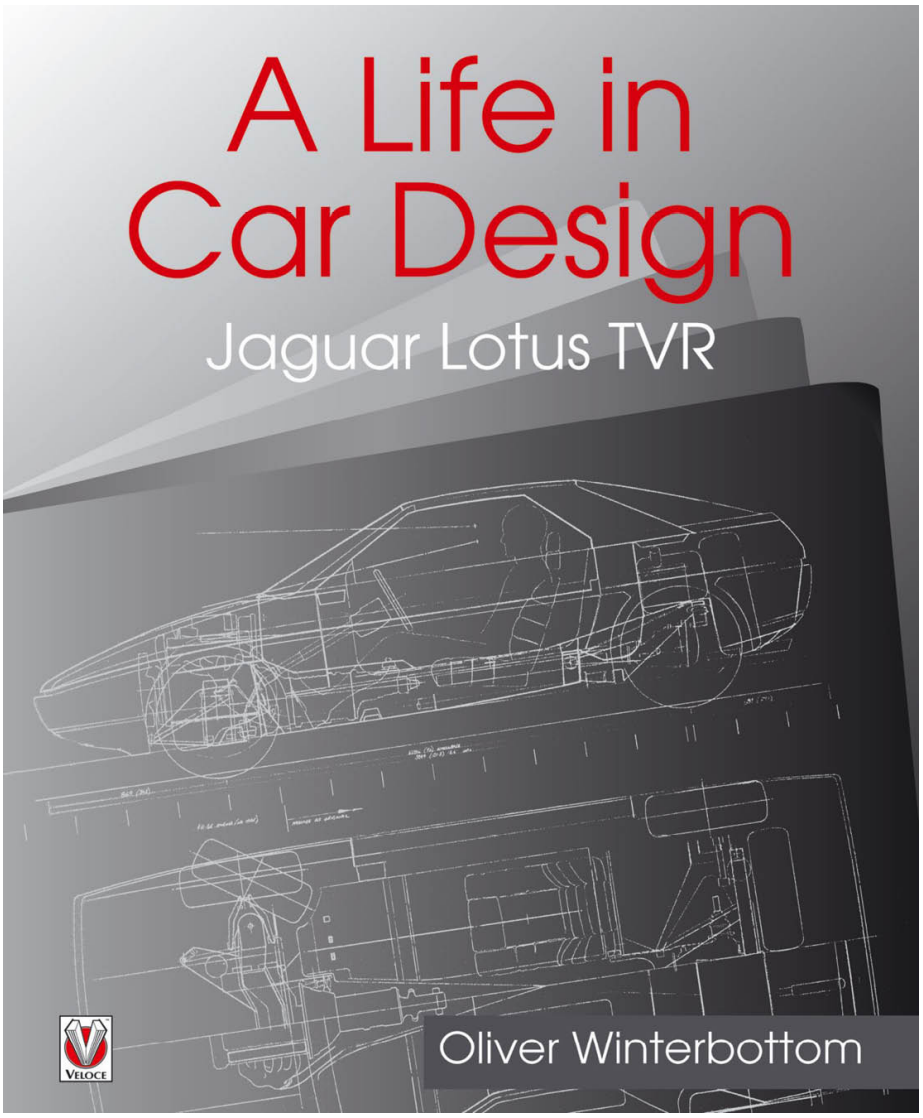
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