The June edition of MotorSport includes a review of Peter Stevens autobiography about the design of the XJR-15

A new hardback on Jaguar's early '90s all-carbon two-seater, by its designer, sets the record straight - by journalist Gordon Cruickshank.

Written by the man who made the car look so seductive, this is the complex tale of how the Jaguar that wasn't meant to be a Jaguar joined the stable of the Coventry firm – even though it had its own outrageously expensive supercar to sell as well. It's a challenge to keep track of the interlacing threads, some of them coloured Silk Cut purple, that weave the story since the man at the centre, the indefatigable Peter Stevens, was involved in so many things at the same time.

The body of the XJR-15 was designed by Peter Stevens. The chassis was based on the Le Mans-winning XJR-9, designed by Tony Southgate. Only 50 were planned (although 53 chassis were eventually made), each selling for £500,000. The XJR-15 was the world's first road-car made entirely from carbon-fibre.

As I was making notes I checked back and forwards thinking, "Was that before or after he was design director at Lotus?", only to find that he was running the Norfolk position in parallel with shaping XJR-15. Not to mention freelance projects.

Peter's parents were both artists and this blend of aesthetics and mechanics has to be one reason why his cars, race or road, have usually looked better than the opposition. That's not a question of styling, it's the integration of design forces with elegant proportion.

Peter Stevens, who went on to co-design the McLaren F1.

Follow the success of Richard Lloyd Racing Porsches and you'll find Peter's hand behind steady aero improvements. Ditto the Commodore saloon racers in Australia.

One man who was a notable influence on this designer was our own Denis Jenkinson, who was Peter's uncle and taught him to be creative with Meccano. "Throw away the instructions and build something new," he told his nephew. "Following the instructions just shows you how to make the same things."

ANOTHER MAJOR INFLUENCE WAS RACER, TEAM MANAGER, MANUFACTURER AND F1 TEAM PRINCIPAL TOM WALKINSHAW.

Stevens feels it's important to show us who Walkinshaw was, and having worked with him for many years he's is a fine source.

He describes Tom as *"a competitive racer first, but an aggressive businessman a close second. To understand the XJR-15 i t's important to understand these motivations because they both drove Walkinshaw. Racing was a business to him."*

On the other hand, while Tom could be scary, Peter adds that "he knew how to have fun with his team" as Mazdas, Rovers and Jaguars fed into the XJR series of sport-racers and sparked Tom's ideas for a road-legal XJR. Intended to be called TWR R9, (the badge designs are illustrated) it was a secret from Jaguar which was also scheming XJ220, until Coventry boss John Egan saw the mutual benefit of both emerging from the TWR JaguarSport umbrella – as long as 15 was slower than 220.

How that idea grew into the world's first production car with a carbon-fibre tub and body is full of fascination and design insights, not just about the sketches, mock-ups, tunnel testing and hours of reshaping clay models but about the "chaotic and challenging character" of much modern car design. No such a complaint about the finished 15 which wowed everyone on launch, especially with that $1m prize fund. Win a race,

Clay model. Stevens' drawings come to life; the development of the XJR-15 was rapid.

win a million' – that was the attention getting headline which put TWR's XJR-15 roadable racer into the public gaze.

Fifty cars (and two prototypes) would be built, 16 prepared for the Intercontinental Challenge rounds at Monaco, Silverstone and Spa, which brought all the attention Tom wanted to lubricate his F1 progress.

It also provoked a great deal of bickering among the investors and owners, Stevens tells us, over who had which car. In the end Armin Hahne took the $1m cheque after some drama-packed racing, but Tom wasn't quick to pay…

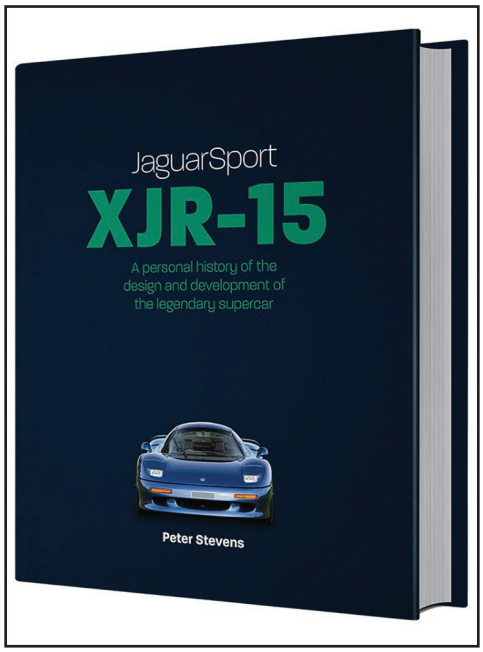
"SOME OF THE LAST CARS WERE SPECCED-UP AS LM VERSIONS AND ARE EXTRA VALUABLE"

Although Peter points out that after the early fanfare values dropped away sometimes to just £100,000. Now, he reckons, they're emerging from a deep sleep, and Don Law Racing can improve the driveability if you require.

There's more history than you'd expect on the WSC and Le Mans achievements, but the author comments that without the LM programme there would not have been an XJR-15. If some of the

The XJR-15 competed in a single-make racing series called the Jaguar Intercontinental Challenge, which supported three Formula 1 races (Monaco, Silverstone and Spa) in 1991. In the end Armin Hahne took the $1m cheque.

"JaguarSport XJR-15", (Hardback). 240 pages and over 270 images, limited to 400 copies. AU $385.00.



book is partly a career portrait of this respected designer – well, he hasn't done an autobiography before – it's also a prolific record embracing work for Ford, Ogle/Reliant, Prodrive, Subaru, Mazda, Lotus, MG, TWR and the McLaren F1.

Then there are the team liveries – he tells a great story about Niki Lauda refusing to drive a Brabham with a new sponsor scheme "that looks like shit". Bernie summons Peter; hours later Lauda is happy, and Peter's Brabham years begin.

Naturally Peter's dramatic sketches figure but also his schedules and notebooks which show the rapid development of XJR-15. There are a few too many samey shots of finished cars, but if you want the proper story, with widespread inaccuracies straightened out, told by the man who couldn't be any closer to it, start here.

Peter Stevens book "JaguarSport XJR-15", a personal history of the design and development of the legendary supercar is published by Porter Press International at Au $385.00. ■

GORDON CRUICKSHANK.

For the entire story, MotorSport Magazine is available online via 'Pocket Mag' or as hard copy from newsagents or by subscription.