

Jaguar at Le Mans - June 1950

The 1950 24 Hours of Le Mans was held on 24 and 25 June 1950. The race was won by the French father-and-son pairing of Louis and Jean-Louis Rosier driving a privately entered Talbot-Lago.

Entries

A record 112 entries were received, and 60 were accepted for the start. But this year, the big news was the first appearance of Jaguar – with three new 3.4L XK-120S. Factory-prepared, they were released to select private entrants to test the waters. [Leslie Johnson (UK) and Bert Hadley (UK) (car No. 17); Peter Whitehead (UK) and John Marshall (UK) (car No. 16); and Peter Clark (UK) and Nick Haines (UK) (car No. 15).]

Practice

Practice showed that the new Ferraris were fastest, with a record five-minute lap time, just ahead of the Talbot-Lagos.

The Race

At the halfway point (3.00am), it was the two Talbots, then a lap back to the Johnson/Hadley Jaguar, and the Rolt/Hamilton Nash-Healey.

By midday the two Talbots, now a lap apart, three laps back to the Jaguar and a further lap to the Nash-Healey.



The 3 privately entered XK-120S lined up prior the start of the 1950 24hr Le Mans race.

With less than 3 hours to go, the Jaguar of Johnson/Hadley had to retire when the clutch finally let go, after the drivers had to use engine-breaking because of a lack of brakes.

In the end, the Talbot-Lago's had their greatest day – coming 1st & 2nd with a record distance covered. By contrast all five Ferraris retired.

Peter Clark/Nick Haines were 12th, Peter Whitehead/John Marshall 16th

and, although they did not finish, Leslie Johnson/Bert Hadley were classified 30th as the last car to retire.

Jaguar management were satisfied with the performance of their cars – two finished, and the other had run as high as second before retiring, but resolved to fix the brake problems that had troubled all three cars through the race.

Jaguar at Le Mans - June 1951



The 1951 Le Mans was won by Walker/Whitehead in their works-entered C-Type.

The 1951 24 Hours of Le Mans was the 19th Grand Prix of Endurance, and took place on 23 and 24 June 1951.

Entries

Of the 60 cars that started, the biggest sensation were the 3 works cars from

Jaguar after their private entry the year before. The C-Type was Jaguar's first ever purpose-built racing car. It used uprated running gear from the standard XK120 and a new lightweight chassis that was draped with a pared down aluminium

body designed to efficiently cut through the air. Weighing 450 kg lighter than the XK-120S, The C-Types were capable of a top speed of 160 mph (257 km/h).

The Jaguars were raced by Leslie Johnson/Clemente Biondetti (XJC-001/ Car No.20); Stirling Moss/Jack Fairman (XJC-002/ Car No. 22) and Peter Walker/ Peter Whitehead (XJC-003/Car No.23).

The Race

Just before midnight, after his car had held the lead for more than 7 hours, Moss' impressive run came to an end – a conrod broke like Biondetti, due to a major loss of oil pressure.

The remaining works Jaguar of Walker/ Whitehead inherited the lead and remained there, winning the race by 9 laps over the second placed car (Talbot). It was Jaguars first win at Le Mans.

Rob Lawrie/Ivan Waller in a private entry XK-120S (car No. 21) finished a creditable 11th. This was the last XK120 to race at LeMans.

Jaguar at Le Mans - June 1952

In 1952, Jaguar, worried by a report about the speed of the Mercedes-Benz 300SLs that would run at Le Mans, modified the C-Type's aerodynamics to increase the top speed. However, the consequent rearrangement of the cooling system

made the cars vulnerable to overheating, and all three retired from the race.

The Peter Whitehead-Ian Stewart and Tony Rolt/Duncan Hamilton cars blew head gaskets, and the Stirling Moss-Peter Walker car, the only one not overheating

having had a full-sized radiator hurriedly fitted, lost oil pressure after a mechanical breakage.

It was an utter disaster and in hindsight, an unnecessary one as the Mercedes turned out to be not nearly as fast as feared. The Jaguars of the previous year could have easily outpaced them.

Testing by Norman Dewis at MIRA after the race proved that the overheating was caused more by the revisions to the cooling system than by the altered aerodynamics.

However, the main drawback of the new body shape was that it reduced downforce on the tail to the extent that it caused lift and directional instability at speeds over 120 mph (193 km/h) on the Mulsanne Straight.

These cars had chassis numbers XKC-001, 002 and 011. The first two were dismantled at the factory, and the third survives in normal C-Type form.



The ill-fated 1952 long-nose, long-tail C-Type Le Mans car at the Jaguar factory.

Jaguar at Le Mans - June 1953

In 1953, the C-Types returned to their winning way finishing first, second and fourth.

Based on the 1951 cars, the 1953 cars were upgraded and adopted thinner aluminium bodywork, revised electrical components and rubber fuel tank bags, leading to the unofficial designation of 'lightweight C-Types'. Indeed, they were around 50Kg lighter than their predecessors. However, the most significant change to the cars was the switch to Dunlop disc brakes, the only vehicles in the race to use disc brakes.

The original twin H8 sand-cast SU carburetors were replaced by three DCO3 40mm Webers, which helped boost power to 220 bhp (164 kW).

The team that went to Le Mans was the same as in 1952: Stirling Moss and Peter Walker (Car 17), Tony Rolt and Duncan Hamilton (Car 18), and Peter Whitehead and Ian Stewart (car 19).

The Race

Despite initial rough running from all three cars, originally believed to be spark plugs, but eventually turning out to be fuel filters, Hamilton and Rolt had soon built up a commanding lead.



Jaguar's works team, in what would turn out to be the C-Type's greatest on-track moment.

Duncan Hamilton and Tony Rolt won the race at 105.85 mph (170.35 km/h) – the first time Le Mans had been won at an average of over 100 miles per hour.

The Moss/Walker car was second with the Whitehead/Stuart car coming fourth behind a Cunningham Chrysler 5.5L V8.

Ninth was the privately entered C-Type, entered by Belgian motor racing team Ecurie Francorchamps for Roger

Laurent and Charles de Tornaco, in their standard production C-Type.

Disc brakes were novel in 1953, and Jaguar's win, partly due to their superiority, set off a scramble to include discs in production cars.

The three celebrity 1953 Le Mans Cars were sold to Ecurie Ecosse and continued to notch up success in production races.

Jaguar at Le Mans - June 1954

1954 is not on the Marques list of victories at Le Mans, but it saw the debut of a new racing Jaguar which was years ahead of its time and was expected to perform well.

However, in the race the D-Types were hampered by fuel starvation caused by problems with the fuel filters, necessitating pit stops for their removal. The D-Type's of Moss/Walker (No.12), and Whitehead/Wharton (No.15) retired with mechanical problems and

the remaining D-Type speed up to catch the leading cars.

The race was narrowly won by a 5.0 litre V12 Ferrari, just ahead of Duncan Hamilton and Tony Rolt in their 3.4 litre D-Type (No.14). It was reported as a thriller right to the end, producing the closest finish for the race since 1933.

Three weeks later the D-Type won the Rheims 12-hour endurance race.

Although the three D-Types stole the show for 1954, the C-Type was not completely finished and Belgian Ecurie Francorchamps had entered again. Although not as fast, the C-Type had proven reliability, and like the D-type, it had disc brakes.

The Belgian 3.4L C-Type of Roger Laurent and Jacques Swaters ran like clockwork and finished 4th. This was the last C-Type to race at Le Mans.



*Jaguar D-Type of Hamilton/Rolt, which placed 2nd overall.
Photo: Clément Bucco-Lechat*

The Belgian 3.4L C-Type of Roger Laurent/Jacques Swaters finished 4th. The last C-Type to race at Le Mans

Jaguar at Le Mans - June 1955

1955 - Catastrophic Accident

For 1955 the D-Types were modified with long-nose bodywork and engines uprated with larger valves.

At Le Mans, they proved competitive with the Mercedes-Benz 300 SLRs, which had been expected to win.

Mike Hawthorn's D-Type had a narrow lead over Juan Manuel Fangio's Mercedes when another Mercedes team car was involved in the most catastrophic accident in motorsport history. Driver Pierre Levegh and more than 80 spectators lost their lives, while more than 120 were injured.

Mercedes withdrew from the race. Jaguar opted to continue, and the D-Type driven by Hawthorn and Ivor Bueb went on to win.

Ecurie Francorchamps D-Type driven by Jacques Swaters and Johnny Claes finished 3rd.



1955 winning 'D' type returning from Le-Mans. Taken at Elmdon airport Birgtingham with mechanics and technical staff.



A crash killed driver Pierre Levegh and at least 81 spectators making it the deadliest accident in motor racing history.

Jaguar at Le Mans - June 1956

Ecurie Ecosse had entered one car for the 1956 24hr Endurance race at Le Mans. Drivers were Ron Flockhart and Ninian Sanderson.

For the '56' Le Mans the works had entered 3 cars. Their pits were adjacent to each other. Within the first couple of laps two of the works cars had an accident, at the end of the Mulsane Straight, hitting a spinning Ferrari, both Jaguars and the Ferrari were out.

The leading Jaguar, with Hawthorn driving, started 'missing' at the 12th lap, after numerous pit stops, changing plugs to no effect, the next time in the pits the bonnet was lifted with the motor still running, there was a white mist pulsating, #3 injection pipe had a hairline crack, (it was the first race using the new Lucas fuel injection system). Fortunately, a spare set of pipes were carried under the passenger seat and after replacing the offending pipe, there were no further dramas. During this time of frequent pit stops, Hawthorn dropped from running 1st down to 12th, by the end of the race the Hawthorn/Bueb car came in a very credible 5th.

The single Ecurie Ecosse entry driven by Flockhart/Sanderson came in 1st, beating the Aston Martin driven by Moss/Collins, by 2 laps. This was the first time that a private entry had won the Le Mans 24hr race.

The biggest disappointment was the privately entered XK140 of Robert Walshaw/Peter Bolton that was disqualified for premature refuelling (21hr) one lap early while running 10th.



Le Mans 1956. Peter Collins, Ron Gaudion, Stirling Moss, Ron Flockhart, Ninian Sanderson. Far Right "Wilkie" Wilkinson and David Murray.

Jaguar at Le Mans - June 1957



1957 Le Mans. The winning Jaguar driven by Ron Flockhart in red, alongside Ivor Bueb and Ron Gaudion, post victory with the Ecosse Team and 'XKD606'.

With no works entries, 5 privately entered D types would hold up the prestige of Jaguar. The two entered by Ecurie Ecosse were Long Nose ex works cars, one being the 3.8L fuel injected car for Ron Flockhart/Ivor Bueb (No. 3). The other D-Type was a 3.4L that Paul Frère had crashed the previous year.

1957 proved to be the D-Type's most successful year. Jaguar D-Types took five of the top six places and Ecurie Ecosse, with considerable support from Jaguar, finished first and second, the best result in the D-Type's racing history.

The Equipe Los Amigos D-Type driven by Jean Lucas/Jean Brussin finished third ahead of the Equipe Nationale Belge car driven by Paul Frère/Freddy Rouselle with and Duncan Hamilton/Masten Gregory coming in 6th behind a loan Ferrari, 27 laps behind the winner.

The great success of the Jaguars became all the more significant when it is considered that all of the cars were privately entered and matched against the works entries of some of the greatest sport car manufacturers.

Jaguar at Le Mans - June 1958

The 1958 24 Hours of Le Mans took place on 21 and 22 June 1958. Tragically one of the Jaguar drivers was killed.

Five 3.0 litre D-Types and two Lister Jaguars started the race. Ecurie Ecosse had two of the Jaguars, but both withdrew with broken pistons after only a few laps, traced to defective valve gear.

Soon after the start, the weather (which was to dominate the rest of the race) suddenly changed as an enormous storm swept across the circuit, flooding the track and reducing the visibility to nil. The track was soon awash and a terrible series of accidents began.

But the worst happened in the twilight just after 10pm when Jean-Marie Brussin lost control of his Jaguar going into the sweeping Dunlop curve after the pits, hitting the earth bank, rolling and ending up near the crest of the rise. Unseen, the next car on the scene was Bruce Kessler's NART Ferrari, running 5th, who smashed into the Jaguar and burst into flames. Kessler was fortunate to be thrown clear, receiving only heavy bruising and broken ribs, but Brussin was killed in the accident.

Duncan Hamilton, running second at the time, was next to the scene but was alerted

by an anonymous spectator throwing his hat onto the track – an action that Hamilton later considered saved his life – by giving him just enough time to lift off and avoid the wrecked cars.

With less than 4 hours to go, Hamilton was 2nd, but it was another heavy thunderstorm that led to his retirement. Coming into Arnage he was suddenly confronted with a stationary Panhard in the road. Taking avoiding action, he lost control and rolled the Jaguar which

landed upside-down straddling a water-soaked ditch. Once again, he was lucky as two spectators nearby, sheltering from the heavy rain, pulled the unconscious Hamilton out before he drowned.

Of the 7 Jaguar powered cars, only the Lister-Jaguar of Bruce Halford/Brian Naylor finished the race, but well down on the winning Ferrari of Phil Hill.

Only 17 of the 55 cars that started, finished the race.



Jean-Marie Brussin, driving D-Type number 11, was tragically killed in one of the many accidents caused by torrential rain that reduced visibility to nil.

Jaguar at Le Mans - June 1959



Ecurie Ecosse Tojeiro-Jaguar (No.8) driven by Ron Flockhart/John 'Jock' Lawrence and Lister Sport (No.1) driven by Ivor Bueb/Bruce Halford and Lister Sport (No.2) driven by Walt Hansgen/Peter Blond at the start of the 1959 Le Mans 24hr race.

The five cars in the S-3000 category all had Jaguar-engines. Lister Engineering brought two of their new Frank Costin-designed cars, with another for the Equipe Nationale Belge, while the previously successful Ecurie Ecosse team this year entered both a Jaguar D-Type for Masten Gregory and Innes Ireland and a Tojeiro-Jaguar for Ron Flockhart and Jock Lawrence.

The Jaguars were fast but uncompetitive against the prototype cars of Aston Martin and Ferrari.

However, the Ecurie Ecosse team was still a competitive force, and by 9pm their Jaguar was running second and the Tojeiro in 4th. But as night fell the pace started taking its toll and all the Jaguar engined cars retired. Only 12 of the 54 cars that started, finished the race.

Aston Martin finally achieved their first outright win, finishing 1st & 2nd.

Jaguar at Le Mans - June 1960

Never to give up, Ecurie Ecosse returned with their 6-year-old D-Type that had finished 2nd in 1957, fitted with a 3.0 litre engine and modified with an enlarged windscreen and luggage hump, detracting from its formerly elegant lines. It was driven by Ron Flockhart and Bruce Halford.

The other Jaguar that caused a sensation and marked a welcome return to Le Mans for American Briggs Cunningham. Jaguar Cars had worked with Cunningham, their New York dealer, to prepare one of their new E-type prototypes for competition. The 3-litre XK-engine developed 290 bhp

giving a top speed of 158 mph (254 km/h). Americans Dan Gurney and Walt Hansgen were the drivers.

During official qualifying Dan Gurney in Jaguar E2A collided at 150 mph (240 km/h) with a Ferrari GT. The repaired Jaguar went out for test laps finding its handling was not perfect.

Start

Jim Clark was first away in his Aston Martin but soon overtaken by Walt Hansgen in the Jaguar prototype. However, after 10 hours, E2A blew a head gasket and retired.

The Ecosse Jaguar had been running alternately third and fourth through the night until at dawn at 5.30am it came to a halt at Arnage with a broken camshaft. It was the end of the illustrious D-Type story at Le Mans.

In August 2008, the 1960 Le Mans race car, E2A (VKV 752) sold for US\$4,957,000 (AU\$7,352,387). At the time it was a world record sale for any Jaguar ever sold.



Jaguar at Le Mans - June 1962

Jaguar was a notable absentee from the 1961 Le Mans, for the first time since 1950, as there was insufficient time to prepare the new E-types, announced only in March 1961.

For 1962, the 1960 Jaguar E2A prototype had now been homologated as the 'E-type' and there were three such cars entered. All were fixed head coupés. The car entered by American Briggs Cunningham (No.10) enjoyed the major benefit of being prepared in the competition department at Browns Lane. It was built up from a bare shell incorporating much of the knowledge gained from preparing the lightened roadster (4 WPD).

The second car, (No. 9) entered and driven by Peter Sargent and Peter Lumsden was prepared by Playfords of West Croydon and was actually an open two-seater which had been given a faired-in roof of their own design. It was using a works-prepared engine and gearbox.

The third E-type was another very genuine private entry, this car belonging to former C and D-Type racer Maurice



Le Mans 1962. Peter Sargent/Peter Lumsden 3.8 Litre E-Type finished a credible 5th.

Charles. The brand new car had been picked up from Browns Lane on May 11, driven to Maurice's garage in Cardiff, was in pieces the same night and, fitted with a D-type cylinder head and gearbox, Mk IX brakes and various other modifications.

The race weekend (23/24 June) was very much one of mixed fortunes for the Jaguars. Maurice Charles' car, co-driven by John Coundley, ran into engine problems in practice and then retired

within four hours after a replacement engine (the 'spare' for the Cunningham car) also expired.

The Lumsden/Sargent E-type was going great guns, however, keeping ahead of Cunningham and Salvadori for 23 of the 24 hours, until oil starvation caused the gearbox to begin seizing. So they ended up fifth, with the Cunningham entry snatching fourth overall, and third in the GT Class to a couple of Ferrari GTOs.

Jaguar at Le Mans - June 1963

Briggs Cunningham was back this year with 3 of the Jaguar E-type 'Lightweight' specials overseen by Lofty England. The fuel-injected 3.8 litre engine now developed 310 bhp. Cunningham drove with Bob Grossman (Car No.15), while Walt Hansgen/Augie Pabst drove car No. 14 and Roy Salvadori/Paul Richards raced Car No. 16).

The fourth Jaguar entrant was the last Lister-Costin built Jaguar WTM 446 entered and driven by Peter Sargent and Peter Lumsden. Although the chassis was four years old, it was fitted with a D-Type engine and gearbox, so prospects of success at Le Mans seemed good.

The Race

The Briggs Cunningham E-Type driven by Walt Hansgen and Augie Pabst retired after 1 hour with gearbox problems.

Drivers Peter Lumsden and Peter Sargent ran steadily until just after four hours when the clutch bolts sheared. It turned that they were supplied with a bad batch of bolts and it was a disappointing outcome when so much effort had gone into the car.

Six hours into the race Salvadori's Jaguar arrived on major oil spill from a

blown engine and spun at 265 kp/h (165 mph) and crashed into the banking. Fortunately, Salvadori (who had been unable to do up his full harness) was thrown out the rear window as the car burst into flames.

By morning Cunningham and Grossman had steadily moved their Lightweight Jaguar into podium position. However, on Sunday morning the brake pedal

snapped as Grossman came to the end of the Mulsanne straight. The car slammed through three rows of haybales, scattering spectators, but he was able to get the car back to the pits. Stealing parts from their third car that had retired in the first hour, they lost two hours but got back into the race and eventually finished a creditable 9th.



*Jaguar produced 12 'Lightweight E-types' specifically for racing.
In 1963 Briggs Cunningham took three of them to Le Mans*

Jaguar at Le Mans - June 1964



In 1964 Peter Sargent and Peter Lumsden raced 'Low Drag' Lightweight E-Type 49 FXN at Le Mans, retiring with gearbox problems after 80 laps.

The Jaguar 3.8L E-Type Lightweights were becoming obsolete and only two privateer entries arrived. Peter Sargent acquired one of the 12 Jaguar

Lightweight E-Types built in 1963, the sixth Lightweight, chassis number 850663, registered 49 FXN. Overtime the car was redesigned to reduce drag

with a more raked and flush-fitting windscreen, long tapering extended nose, modified rear and lowered by four inches. (Car No. 17).

At Le Mans the car was very fast and achieved 174 mph (280 km/hr), and they were well positioned, 12th, after five hours, but gearbox trouble developed and they retired at around midnight.

Peter Lindner acquired the 5th all aluminium car built and sent it back to Jaguar to have a Low Drag body grafted onto it in place of the previously removable hard top. (Car No. 16).

During the race, around dawn the Lindner Jaguar was back in the pits, overheating. But with 10 laps until its next permitted refill, it was retired.

Unfortunately, Peter Lindner was tragically killed in the car when it was hit from behind while leaving the pits at Monthléry near Paris in October 1964.