

# Celebrating 90 Years Of The SS Jaguar (1935-2025)

On 21 September 1935, SS Cars launched two new models at a trade luncheon for dealers and press at London's Mayfair Hotel. The cars were the first cars to use the word Jaguar as a model name.

The cars on display were the SS Jaguar 2½-litre saloon with its 102 bhp six-cylinder Weslake-designed cross-flow ohv cylinder head on its Standard engine and also a similar looking but scaled-down version using a 1½-litre four-cylinder side-valve engine.

## How Much?

Luncheon guests were asked to write down the UK price for which they thought the 2½-litre saloon car would be sold for and the average of their answers was £765. Even in that deflationary period, the actual price at just £395 would have been a pleasant surprise for many customers. The side valve 1 ½ four cylinder sold for £90 less.

## Design

The SS Jaguar 2½-litre saloon was a car, with its beautiful Lucas P100 headlamps, swooping wing-line and high class interior, that was fit to be compared with the likes of Alvis and even Bentley whose own 3 ½ litre models were certainly no more lively yet cost twice or three times as much. From a company that had only been making complete cars for four years, it was an amazing achievement.

The *Motor Magazine* in its announcement issue of 24 September 1935 referred to the SS Jaguar's distinguished appearance, outstanding performance and attractive price. With its new 2½-litre engine it could now compete with the MG SA.

## William Lyons

In a speech of Lyons as the chairman and managing director to the shareholders on 11 October 1935, he said: "This new car, which is called the Jaguar and has received a most enthusiastic reception from the whole of the trade and public has been produced to an ideal.

It has fulfilled all our most optimistic anticipations, for it was intended to produce a car of extremely high quality and performance, hitherto associated with only the most exclusive type of car, at a moderate price."

## Steel Frame

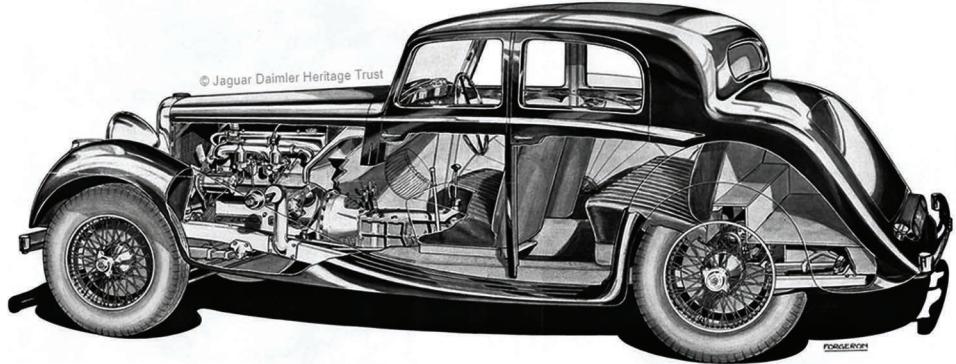
In 1938 saloon and drophead production moved from coachbuilt (wood framed) to all steel and a 3½-litre engine was added to the range.



When the SS Jaguar 2 ½ litre Saloon was launched in September 1935 at the Mayfair Hotel in London, Lyons asked the journalists to guess the price, and the average guess was £632, the actual price was only £395. The SS Jaguar 1 ½ was £305.

## The New 2½-litre SS Jaguar Four-door Saloon

A DISTINCTIVE 90 M.P.H. SIX-CYLINDER SPORTS CAR IN THE DESIGN OF WHICH COMFORT, ROOMINESS AND REFINED RUNNING HAVE BEEN SPECIALLY CONSIDERED



The SS Jaguar 1 ½ and 2 ½ litre Saloons were the first models to carry the Jaguar name and the first four-door car offered by the SS Company.



The first version of the SS Jaguar 2 ½ litre saloon (1935-1937 wood framed body) can be easily identified by the spare wheel poking above the bonnet line.

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The 2½-litre and 3½-litre cars shared the same chassis and body design, although it was necessary to use a wider radiator for the 3½-litre.

The new 1½-litre for 1938 used the same body shell as the six-cylinder cars but on a shorter chassis and its new larger 1776 cc engine had overhead valves.

These were produced as a four-door saloon and as a drop-head Coupé, both seating five. The cars also used an uprated Standard synchromesh gearbox and the latest Girling hydraulic brakes.

The 1935-37 models had a single fender mounted spare tyre; the 1938-40 models had the tyre under the boot in a compartment.

The radiator shell had vertical chrome bars. The front sidelights on early cars are a separate chrome unit, but on later cars were done by welding a pod onto the fender and blending in with lead.

Horns are generally visible, mounted on the bumper or under the headlights. Some cars have fog-lights. The door handles are below the chrome side trim on early cars, but in line with the trim on later cars.

The tyres were 18" rim diameter with wire spoke wheels, with the chromed knock-off hub having the SS logo. The optional Ace discs covered the spokes to give the appearance of disc wheels.

Like the 1½, all cars featured an integrated boot complete with a tray of tools, the start of a long-standing Jaguar tradition.

The SS Jaguar saloon was described by *The Autocar Magazine* as "a real masterpiece of aesthetic and practical proportioning".

There were a few special bodies done by various other coachbuilders including Graber, Saoutchik, Beuttler, Van den Plas and a Mulliner divided limousine for Standard's director Sir John Black.

## Jaguar 1½ litre, 2½ litre & 3½ litre

Because of the World War 2 unsavoury connotations of the original initials, in February 1945 SS Cars became Jaguar Cars and in September of that year they went back into production with its pre-war saloon car range.

The name Mark IV was never an official factory designation for the 1945-48 cars, but has been unofficially hung on these by the aficionados ever since the early '50s.

All the Mark IV's were built on a separate chassis frame with suspension by semi-elliptic leaf springs on rigid axles front and rear.



Ticker tape parade for Shirley Strickland after her success at the 1952 Helsinki Olympics. (1939 3½ litre SS Jaguar Drophead Coupe. Car now owned by Rod Mathers).



A very rare photo these days. Rod & Sue Greasley, 1939 2½ litre SS Jaguar DHC (Qld) and 1939 3½ litre SS Jaguar DHC of Rod Mathers (WA).



October 1945 witnessed Jaguar restart manufacture of cars. These 1½ saloons were the first off the production line.

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Mechanically these are the same as the pre-war saloon range and were produced in saloon and DHC form. The 2.5 and 3.5 engines were now produced by Jaguar, Lyons having bought the tooling from Standards, who continued to supply the 1.5 engine, making it the last Jaguar to be built with an outsider engine.

Visual differences between these and the pre-war SS Jaguar saloons are very minor. The radiator badge reads "Jaguar" with the engine size, the SS logo having been eliminated. The badge in the centre of the rear bumper is a "J", replacing the "SS".

The tires are 18" rim diameter with wire spoke wheels, and optional Ace discs covered the spokes to give the appearance of disc wheels. The wheel knock-off hubs also say Jaguar rather than SS.

## 1½ litre cars

The pre-war 1½ litre cars were available as a saloon or drophead Coupé, but post war, only the closed model was made.

Performance was not a strong point but 70 mph (113 km/h) was possible. The car featured the same cabin dimensions and well-appointed interior as its longer-engined brothers. Despite its lack of out-and-out performance, a report of the time, comparing the 4-cylinder 1½-litre with its 6-cylinder siblings, opined that the smallest-engined version of the car was "as is often the case ... the sweetest running car" with a "big car cruising gait in the sixties".

## 2½ & 3½ litre cars

The 2½ litre cars were approximately 300mm longer than the 1½ litre to accommodate the six-cylinder engine. The passenger compartment was the same size.

The 3½ Litre, was essentially the same body and chassis as the 2½ Litre and the larger 125 bhp engine gave better performance but at the expense of economy. The rear axle ratio was 4.25:1 as opposed to the 4.5:1 on the 2½ Litre.

## Production

- The 1½ Litre ceased in 1949. From 1935-1949, 10,980 cars were built.
- The 2½ Litre ceased in 1948. From 1935-1948, 6,281 cars were built.
- The 3½ Litre ceased in 1948. From 1937-1948, 3,162 cars were built.

The cars were succeeded by the Mark V (1948-1951). ■

## Bob & Margaret Kretschmer, 1939 SS Jaguar 1½ litre sedan. #70055

Built by SS Cars Ltd. Coventry England, July 1939 and Shipped in August 1939 to Tozer, Kemsley & Midbourne Ltd. (KTM) Melbourne Australia. It is one of only 688 built. Most of the pre-war 4-cylinder 1½ cars have not survived.

In 1938 the saloon and DHC production moved from coachbuilt (wood framed) to all steel. The new 1½-litre from 1938 used the same body shell as the six-cylinder cars but on a shorter chassis and its new larger 1776 cc engine had overhead valves. For 1939 there were many changes including SU side-draft carburettors in place of Solex down-draft carburettors.

In September 1939 the car was registered to Mrs Crosby, wife of John Crosby who was the director of Standard Cars, the distributor of SS cars at the time. The car had a number of owners and is believed to have been owned by the Ashton Circus family. It was acquired by Graham McRae of Elizabeth East SA in 1971.

In 1997 a friend of Bob's told him about an old Jaguar for sale at Salisbury. Bob bought the car without realising that it was an S.S. as it had a Jaguar engine. With substantial advice & help, Bob managed to finish it, by then aware that it was an S.S.

The original engine KA 3393 was replaced at some point in time with a Mk IV engine (KB 2163E). Bob acquired an SS Jaguar 1½ litre engine and rebuilt and installed it. The engine (KA 3292E) was originally fitted to a 1940 SS Jaguar 1½ litre (#70248) that was also shipped to KTM Melbourne in October 1939 and is believed to have been subsequently wrecked.

Bob restored his car with technical help from Bruce Fletcher. Chassis & Body was undertaken by Chris Hudson and Bob fitted the car with a Celica gearbox. Instruments from Vintage Restorations, England; Timberwork by Bob Lynch & Giovani Silvestry and repaint by Marque Restorations (Gerard Miller - Bentley 'Silver Tempest'); upholstery by NEAT Upholstery, Jason Robinson (Muirhead leather, Camel tones); machining by Paul Knapp; electrical wiring loom by Vintage Wiring Harness and fitted by Bruce Fletcher along with timing (valve & ignition).

Replacement parts by Bruce Fletcher, Keith Bell, Ross Gogler, Steve Byles, Bob Lynch, with engine parts from Jag Parts England and general assistance from Richard Kretschmer.

The full restoration took 14 years. Bob drove it to the Broken Hill Border-Run in 2008 despite not being fully finished. Marg & Bob have participated in every Border Run since then, apart from the 2016 Run to Orange due to health reasons. ■

