

The Origins of An Icon - Part 1

Jaguar Australia are producing a content series called "The Origins of An Icon". Each month they will be exploring some of Jaguar's greatest defining moments. The first in the series is as follows.



William Lyons

Founder of Jaguar Cars

William Walmsley

Co-Founder of Swallow Sidecars

Jaguar has always been famous for delivering a unique combination of sportiness, luxury and style.

From its great motorsport triumphs across the years, highlighted by its wins at Le Mans, and one of the great motoring icons of all time, the legendary E-Type, through to the outstanding cars of today, including the F-PACE SVR 575 EDITION and the all-electric I- PACE, Jaguar continues to offer outstanding driving pleasure in a compelling package.

To trace the birth of Jaguar, we go back to the northern English seaside town of Blackpool, where a young motorcycle enthusiast by the name of Bill Lyons,

not yet 21 years of age, met William Walmsley, who was building a stylish sidecar which he was attaching to reconditioned motorcycles.

Young Lyons immediately displayed the two traits that would be his greatest qualities for the next 50 years or so. His business acumen shrewdly spotted a good commercial opportunity and his eye for style appreciated the attractive appearance of these normally mundane creations.

In September 1922, shortly after Lyons' 21st birthday, the Swallow Sidecar Company was formed by Lyons and Walmsley with a bank overdraft of £1,000.

As the business grew, the company expanded, adding car body repairs to the sidecar business, before expanding into building car bodies. The name of the business was changed to Swallow Sidecar and Coachbuilding Company.

Lyons saw a great business opportunity when he created a stylish two-seater body which was mounted on the chassis of the Austin Seven, which had been released in 1927. An order for 500 was obtained from one of the main London garages, Henlys, and production commenced. At £175, or £185 with a hinged hardtop, the splendid little Austin Seven Swallow proved highly popular, and the company also introduced a Swallow body for the larger Morris Cowley chassis.

The Origins of An Icon (cont)



The range increased significantly with the introduction of the Austin Seven Swallow Saloon in late 1928. Priced at £187, the Saloon was not expensive, but it looked it! With sales of the cars and sidecars continuing to increase, it was decided to move to the Midlands,

traditional heartland of the British motor industry. Thus, the young company was moved 'lock, stock and barrel' to Coventry.

In 1931, Swallow (with Sidecars having been dropped from the name) launched

two new models, the SS I and SS II, built on a chassis made by The Standard Motor Company, with competitive pricing, despite their premium styling – something which would become synonymous with Jaguar throughout its history.

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The Origins of An Icon (cont)



1937 SS Jaguar 2 1/2 Litre Saloon CDU 700

The SS Coupes were duly presented at the 1931 London Motor Show, and a sensation they certainly caused. The body was ultra-low and the bonnet outrageously long.

In 1934, co-founder Walmsley left the company, leaving Lyons at the helm. He renamed it S.S. Cars (Standard Swallow) and then formed an Engineering Department and appointed a young William Heynes to be his Chief Engineer.

Heynes was to play a major role with the company for the next 35 years.

In 1935, the first car bearing the Jaguar name was launched, the SS Jaguar 2 1/2 Litre Saloon, representing elegant design, power and agility.

Alongside the saloon, a two-seater roadster, the SS Jaguar 100 launched in 1936, with an advertised top speed of 100mph (161km/h).

This car was also the first to carry what would become an iconic automotive symbol, the 'leaping jaguar' hood ornament, which was first offered to the public in 1938.

Thank you to the Jaguar Daimler Heritage Trust for their support on Jaguar history and photography. ■

Jaguar Australia