

The Story of the Swallow Coach Building Company

Editor: The following story is by Paul Cummins of the Jaguar Drivers' Club of Australia. Paul is the son of the late, well known and respected Ian Cummins. The latter half of the story contains interesting history of ex "C" & "D" type Jaguars. Thank you to JDCA and Paul Cummins.

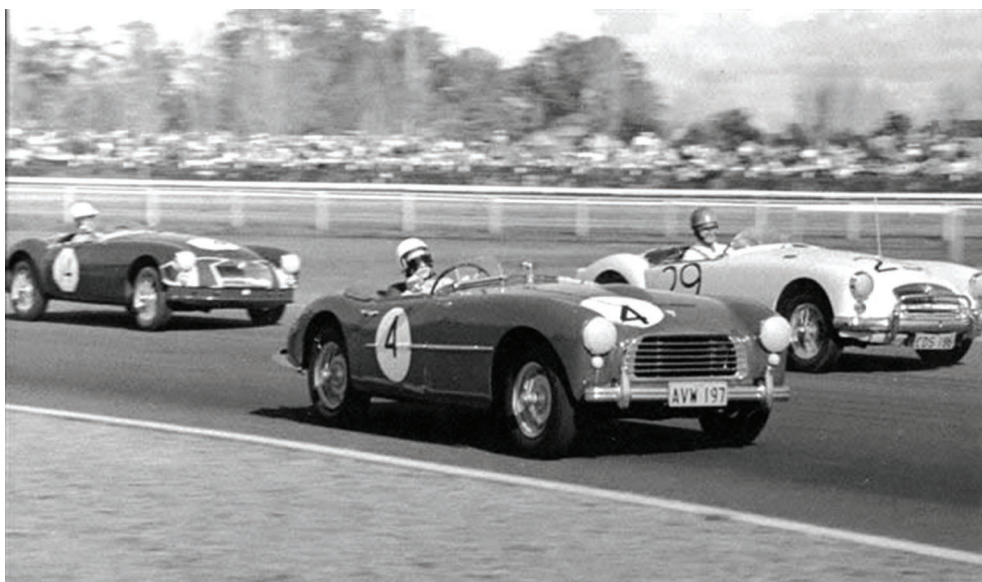
The Car that Jaguar Would Not Swallow

In 1954 the Swallow Coachbuilding (1935) Company started to make a sports car based on Triumph TR2 mechanicals with a neat "Barchetta" style body called the Swallow Doretti. While there are no direct connections with Jaguar, it does have links due to its name and also to its demise.

Most who are familiar with Jaguar car history will know that in 1922 it started as the Swallow Sidecar Company building motorcycle sidecars with the two Williams; Lyons and Walmsley. By 1927 they had started building open two-seater bodies onto Austin Seven rolling chassis.

A couple of company name changes occurred in the 1920s. Then in 1934 after William Walmsley left, there was another name change, this time to SS Cars Limited. The sidecar enterprise was shifted to one side, renamed Swallow Coachbuilding Co. (1935) Limited and was controlled by William Lyons.

In 1944 this sidecar business was sold to Helliwell Group who continued



Lorraine Hill, 1961 at Warwick Farm driving a Swallow Doretti (Chassis #1205).

building sidecars. In 1946 they added a little motor scooter called the Swallow Gadabout designed by Frank Rainbow, a former Bristol aircraft engineer. In 1950 Helliwell, and therefore Swallow, was bought by Tube Investment Group (TI). TI amongst other things supplied steel and parts to the British car industry.

In 1953 a convergence of interests by Eric Sanders of TI and John Black the Managing Director of Standard-Triumph Cars led to the appointment of Cal Sales (Arthur Andersen and his daughter Dorothy Deen) as the Southern California Triumph importer and distributor. Included in this deal was the

concept of a new two-seater sports car aimed at the American market.

In 1953 Frank Rainbow was tasked with designing the car, his first car design. Standard-Triumph supplied Triumph TR2 2-litre 4-cylinder engines, gearboxes, axles, and suspension units. A tubular manganese- molybdenum (chromoly) steel chassis was dressed with a double skinned body (steel inner and alloy outer) by Panelcraft Limited. It was tilted more to touring than racing.

The car was called the Swallow Doretti. Doretti was a faux-Italianised version of Dorothy's name. It had been used for the Andersen's aftermarket accessories business Cal Specialities Co. and was signed over to Swallow for US\$1. Who wouldn't want a car named after them! In the 1950s Dorothy would become the driving force in the success of Triumph cars in the USA, west of the Mississippi River.

Slightly larger and heavier than a TR2 with better handling, it was also better finished but more expensive. List price in the UK of a TR2 was £910 while the Doretti was £1,102 (£1,158 with overdrive). A test by UK magazine 'The Motor' found it could just crack the 100mph mark. Overall, it received favourable reviews in the press. Despite its higher price the Doretti sold well and plans were made for an upgraded replacement called the Sabre, but after 10 months and only 276 cars being made, production was abruptly halted.



1205 Swallow Doretti 2023 April Paul Cummins

OR - The Car that Jaguar Would Not Swallow

It seems the British motor industry, apparently most vocal being William Lyons, did not take kindly to one of their major suppliers of materials competing with them.

Citing a conflict of interest due to access to cheaper raw materials, Lyons allegedly told TI to choose between being a car manufacturer or to continue supplying Jaguar with materials.

Economically the latter choice made more sense, by a huge margin. In 1956 the Swallow Coachbuilding Company (1935) Limited was sold to sidecar manufacturer Watsonian.

Australian Connection

Despite being aimed at the American market about 12 RHD Doretts were sold new in Australia, including mine. Chassis number #1205 was sold new to Steven Stuart of Bowral NSW in 1955. He sold it 5 years later to local hairdresser Lorraine Hill. She started to race #1205 at Warwick Farm, Hume Weir, Oxley's Hill Climb, Catalina (Katoomba) etc. Lorraine would go on to race other cars including at the 1962 Bathurst 6 Hour race and the first two Bathurst Armstrong 500 races.

Lorraine's brother Lance Hill also raced cars and was well known to NSW Jaguar enthusiasts as he owned an **XK120** and an **SS 100** from the early 1960s until his death in Bowral in 2018.

Lorraine sold #1205 in 1963 to George Parlby. George used the car as daily transport. Around 1971 while going to



Chassis #1205 Doretti. Photo taken in 2008 when picked up by Warren McEwen

a party on the North Shore, he had a pit stop at the Hilton in the city. Further into the journey he spun the car at the intersection of Pacific Highway and Mona Vale Road in Pymble hitting a telegraph pole.

George would later own some interesting cars including a Ford GT40, Jaguar 'C'-Type XKC037 which he bought from my father (Ian) in 1977 and Jaguar 'D'-Type XKD520, that he bought from Bob Jane in 1980.

In 1972 the wrecked Doretti was bought at auction by Les Taylor of Cammeray. He intended to rebuild and race it. After some initial repairs it sat in his backyard shed in pieces for 36 years.

It was rescued in 2008 and restored by Warren McEwen and I purchased it in 2020.

A side note: Long before Carroll Shelby thought of dropping an American V8 engine into a British car, in 1954 Max Balchowsky transplanted a V8 Buick engine into a Doretti calling it the Buretti Special. He built several more for customers. While the V8 Doretti project didn't make him famous it would lead to his more successful Ol' Yaller projects. In the 1959 film "On the Beach" Max drove his Buretti in the 'Australian Grand Prix' scene. Max was attracted to the strength of the car and described the Doretti as "It was the only car that was strong enough for a 250-pound man to sit on without damaging it. It had the strongest body around. The rest of the car was just as strong."

The continued existence of #1205 attests to that.

BY PAUL CUMMINS



Chassis#1205 Swallow Doretti. Lorraine Hill at Oxleys Hill Bowral 1961