HISTORY

Eighth wonder

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY **PAUL WALTON**

The eighth XJ-S off the production line was given to Jaguar's Experimental Department where it was driven by Ed Abbott and used to further develop fuel injection plus an upgraded V12. Sold under the counter, it spent 30 years in Sweden before Ed saw it for sale and bought it. We trace the remarkable history of this fabulous car

ON THE face of it this is just another early XJ-S, little different from the other 15,525 pre-HE examples produced between 1975 and 1981. But look closely, and you'll notice that this is a very special car; the car's chassis number makes this the eighth production example. If the XJ-S' 21-year production run were a book, this car is the foreword.

Having recently returned to the UK after three decades in Sweden, and now owned by one of its original test drivers, we look into its history and how it survived. ►

HISTORY
EIGHTH XJ-S

Chassis 2W1008BW was manufactured in January 1975, nine months before the model's launch in September. It had been allocated to Jaguar's Experimental Department from the outset, where it was given the code XJ27/LC2. Since the car was going to be used internally, halfway through painting the colour changed from its original silver to Primrose Yellow, using remaining stocks of this unpopular colour. Once in Experimental, it was often driven by a young Ed Abbott.

Abbott had joined Jaguar as an apprentice in 1970, aged just 16. After spending time in the Vehicle Safety Department, located at Daimler's former plant at Radford, he then joined Norman Dewis' team of development drivers at the Experimental Department in 1973. Incredibly, the XJ-S was a long way from being finished, even though only two years remained before it was due to be launched. There were three main reasons for this.

Firstly, the lack of manpower and facilities. Says Ed, "There was only Norman – who, by then, was constantly tied-up in meetings – three test drivers, and a small workshop with clapped-out ramps. To get anything done you needed to ask favours around Jaguar."

Secondly, there were plenty of other projects in development, including the XJ Series 2, the XJ coupe and adding Lucas' fuel injection to the V12.

Finally, there was a feeling that the car didn't need that much development because the XJ-S was heavily based on the XJ saloon, and used many tried-and-tested parts. "Other than a bit of ride and brake testing, there wasn't an awful lot of XJ-S work going on," Ed reveals.

The car in the mid-Eighties, registered NDA 904P, with its larger wheels and sportier wing mirrors

It wasn't until mid-1974, when Experimental took delivery of a handful of preproduction cars (followed in early 1975 by the first production examples, including 2W1008BW) that work really started to be ramped up. Despite his age, Ed was responsible for much of it. "I was young and keen, and for some reason Norman trusted me."

Between 1975 and 1977, 2W1008BW was used to develop Lucas' D-Jetronic fuel injection system, an area of the XJ-S' development that up until then had been largely overlooked. "The first running prototypes in 1973 were on carburettors because the fuel injection wasn't sorted," says Ed. "Until then, all the fuel injection development work had been with an XJ12 Series 1 because it had more room in the back for equipment."

There's more to do, but it handles and goes well and I plan on just using it

Jaguar's bodyshop trialled rubbing strips in the late Seventies, so they remain on the car

In 1977, 2W1008BW was fitted with the short-lived and little-known 10:1 compression version of the V12 and Lucas' new P System digital fuel injection. "The original 5.3 V12 engine was originally designed to have 10:1 compression, plus fuel injection by Brico Engineering Ltd," explains Ed. "Brico, though, pulled out of developing the system at the last minute. So, for the E-type Series 3, Jaguar put on four Stromberg carburettors. But the emissions were poor so the compression had to be reduced to 9:1, which killed the power." By 1975, and with fuel injection fitted to the XJ-S, Jaguar's engineers realised the compression could be increased for a tad more power. "The Primrose car was fitted with the first hand-built 10:1 compression V12, plus Lucas' new digital fuel injection with a revised ECU." This saw an increase in power from the 285bhp of early examples to 300bhp. Although rare, the 10:1 compression cars are today considered to be the best of the pre-HE models.

For the majority of the time, the car was used by both Jaguar and Lucas engineers on trade plates so it wasn't until September 1975 that it and five other examples received Coventry LDU registrations and were made available to the British press. It's not known if the Primrose Yellow car – registered LDU 887P – ever featured in a magazine, but LDU 867P was used by *Motor Sport* and LDU 870P was tested by both *Motor* and *Autosport*.

A hard life – coupled with an indifferent finish – meant all of Jaguar's experimental cars were eventually supposed to go to a scrapyard in Kenilworth to be crushed. Says Ed, "If a thermocouple was needed, for example, we'd simply drill a hole in the bulkhead, never bothering with rubber grommets. Seat covers were unheard of, so, with the mechanics' overalls being covered in oil, the seats would get quite mucky."

By 1980, the 10:1 project was over, replaced by the High Efficiency V12; 2W1008BW was sent to the breaker's yard, its work finished. ►

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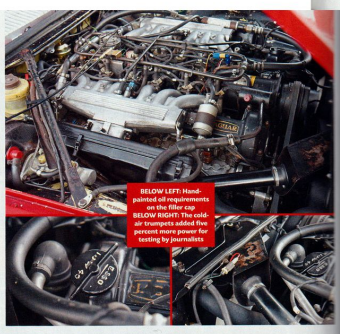
After leaving Jaguar in 1985, Ed turned his back on the company and its products completely. Together with his brother, Lionel, he formed the very successful Abbott Racing Motorsport Team; over 15 years, it won several British Saloon Car Championships with Saab UK. Because he had already started to use his experience with the marque to design performance upgrades for Saabs, when racing stopped it was only natural for him to continue, becoming one of the world's leading specialists in the Swedish brand. He still is.

Ed's interest in Jaguar was reignited in the early 2010s when he bought a Mk 2 and a Mk V, rallying the latter. In 2015, they were joined by a 1980 XJ-S, which Ed uses to compete in events all over Europe [see January 2017, p62]. When he saw what was advertised by its Swedish owner on an XJ-S Facebook page as the eighth production example, it piqued his interest. He was initially sceptical it could be such an early car, but that soon changed when he received a picture of the engine bay and saw a pair of non-standard cold-air intakes.

"The XJ-S had to match the E-type V12 when it was tested by magazines otherwise it wouldn't be considered as good. So, one of the cheats we used was to put cold-air intake trumpets onto the press cars – which would produce about five percent more power – to improve their performance. After the journalists had thrashed the cars up and down MIRA for the performance figures, under the pretence of a coffee we'd say to them, 'Why not come back to Browns Lane – we'll refuel the cars and make sure everything is okay'. Behind the scenes, we'd quickly take off the cold-air intakes and put on some blanking plates ready for the journalists to take the cars away for a couple of weeks."



BELOW LEFT: Hand-painted oil requirements on the filler cap BELOW RIGHT: The cold-air trumpets added five percent more power for testing by journalists

Convinced of its authenticity, when the Swedish owner shipped the car to the UK ready to be sold via auction, Ed snapped it up. Not only did the chassis number definitely make it the eighth car, but when Ed put it on a ramp in his workshop, the axle and gearbox still had thermocouples for measuring temperature. All of this meant it was definitely one of the first production cars, not that Ed has a strong recollection of it. "I'd have driven it, but I don't remember it," he says. ►

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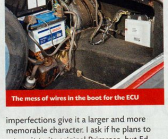
Ed reckons the reason the XJ-S survived was down to the Kenilworth breaker's yard doing dodgy deals with local dealers, illegally selling Jaguar's experimental cars, including 2W1008BW. It was immediately respayed in the more popular Signal Red and sold to an owner in Solihull, before moving to Tunbridge Wells four years later. Around this time, the car received the larger alloy wheels that were de rigueur of the time, plus a pair of sportier – but inappropriate – wing mirrors. In 1989, a Swedish engineer working in the North of England oil industry bought the car and took it back to Sweden with him, where it was registered PAM 902.

According to Ed, the car has never been restored although it was off the road for several years while in Sweden. So, other than replacing a noisy water pump, a leaking oil cooler, and the tired front shock absorbers, along with tweaking the front camber, putting on a new set of Avon tyres and recharging the air conditioning, Ed hasn't done a great deal to the car. "There's more to do, but it handles and goes well and I plan on just using it." He has also secured the original LDU 887P registration.

When I visit Ed's Essex-based workshop in September 2020, it's clear that the red car isn't an immaculate example, but the imperfections give it a larger and more memorable character. I ask if he plans to return it to its original Primrose, but Ed says, "The red is part of the car's story, plus to repaint it properly you'd have to take the whole car apart; I'd rather make it mechanically sound instead."



The mess of wires in the boot for the ECU

Thankfully, it's back on Kent alloys, but there are still two holes in the passenger side door where the now-removed aftermarket wing mirror once was. It also has some wide and ungainly black rubber strips along its flanks, fitted as a trial by Jaguar in the late Seventies. "I can distinctly remember being asked by some chaps from body design if they could put rubbing strips on one of Experimental's XJ-Ss, plus a saloon. Next thing I know, they're on a couple of cars, which I thought looked rubbish. Even when the car was painted red those mouldings were left on."

The interior is standard early XJ-S, with every surface covered in black vinyl. But then, I open the bootlid. In the corner is a mass of unruly wires, and an ECU wedged into the side aperture rather than mounted behind the right-hand trim panel as per the production models. Although it's a mess, Ed says this is exactly how it would have looked when the car was still with Experimental, so won't be changed.

Ed is hoping to buy the fourth production car soon while number three lives in Sweden, but with both requiring major restoration it suggests number eight is the earliest production right hand drive XJ-S on the road in the UK – and Ed kindly offers me a drive. The 10:1 compression V12 feels stronger than the earlier 285bhp models, the acceleration a fraction harder. Ed's experience in Jaguar's Experimental Department is obvious by how it handles: with sharp, accurate steering, plus perfectly damped suspension, it is one of the nicest and quickest early XJ-Ss I've driven.

It might be in the detail that makes Ed's XJ-S special, but it's everything else that makes the car fabulous.

Thanks to: Ed Abbott (www.abbottjaguar.co.uk)