



Terry Larson with his 1958 Lister Jaguar (Factory Team Car)

Great Garages

TERRY LARSON — JAG JOY

written by David M. Brown

photos by David Urbanic

"These cars are an important part of automotive history, and, as owners, we are their caretakers," Terry Larson says.

The Mesa, Arizona, resident knows how to take care of them, for sure — in particular, Jaguars, the company co-founded by Sir William Lyons as a motorcycle sidecar business in 1920s England. For moving on five decades, Larson has restored, raced and stewarded examples of the great marque with finesse and passion, in recent years from his hand-crafted garage in Mesa.

He and wife Darlene have a 1938 Jaguar SS 100 3 ½ litre; an XK120 roadster; a 1952 Hangsen Jaguar; a 1952 C-type; a 1958 'Knobbly' Lister that was a factory team car; XKE roadsters and a coupe; a few Italian cars; and a 1967 Corvette.

The couple are also proud of their motorcycle collection, highlighted by a 1924 Brough Superior SS80 purchased new

by the founder of Jaguar, William Lyons, which he raced on English beaches.

"It is important we protect the heritage of these cars, especially the exceptionally rare cars," says Larson, who was written two books on the Jaguar C-type, D-type and light-weight XKE.

"The books are registers which cover the detailed history of each car built," he says, "so someone cannot come up with a fake of that chassis number in the future. They will help protect the marque."

Fast, not Farming, is the Future

Larson grew up on a small farm where early on he learned hard work, mechanics, welding and driving. "I was a car guy as long as I can remember and was saving money for a car



1938 Jaguar SS100 3 1/2-litre

when I was 8 years old," he recalls. "I always liked to operate machinery and equipment and started driving a truck in the field when I could barely reach the pedals. I used pillows to get close enough to operate it."

He had a driver's license and a car at 13. He looked forward to after the grain was harvested as the stubble of grain stock on the field made for perfect drifting, just slightly slick. "My father would always comment that he could tell I was in the field again!" he says, noting that his friends enjoyed "normal" sports, while he played in the field and on dirt roads.

He worked on the farm, at a local fuel station, and an auto repair and machine shop rebuilding small engines and working on cars. After high school, he moved to Arizona – his parents spent winters here at times — and attended Universal Technical Institute's car program in Phoenix. He then took a job at a local dealership. "There were better opportunities in the automotive world in Arizona," he recalls.

His first British car was a Triumph TR 6, followed by a 1965 E-type, which he restored. "I read about it in a Road and Track magazine," he recalls. "I loved the styling and dash layout. I thought they were amazing cars and still do."

In 1975, he and Darlene married and bought a home with a two-car garage. "I decided I wanted to focus on doing full restorations, so I sold the XKE and bought a MK7 sedan for \$350 that needed everything."

Already knowledgeable in the mechanical side, he learned how to do body work, leading, paint and body, wood veneering and the rest of the restoration, doing everything except the chrome and leather work. Much of this, he says, was self-taught.

He sold the MK7 at auction for \$7,800 in the late '70s – a world record price at that time for the model. "I spent a great deal of time on the restoration and made little for my time, but it got me exposure and accomplished what I needed," he says. "I realized I needed to pay my dues and help establish a reputation."

Darlene has driven two E-types as daily cars to work for 11 years, proving the car's reliability. She was his parts runner and sometimes test driver while also working at a doctor's office. "I didn't have anything to drive at first," he says. "I just stayed home and worked."

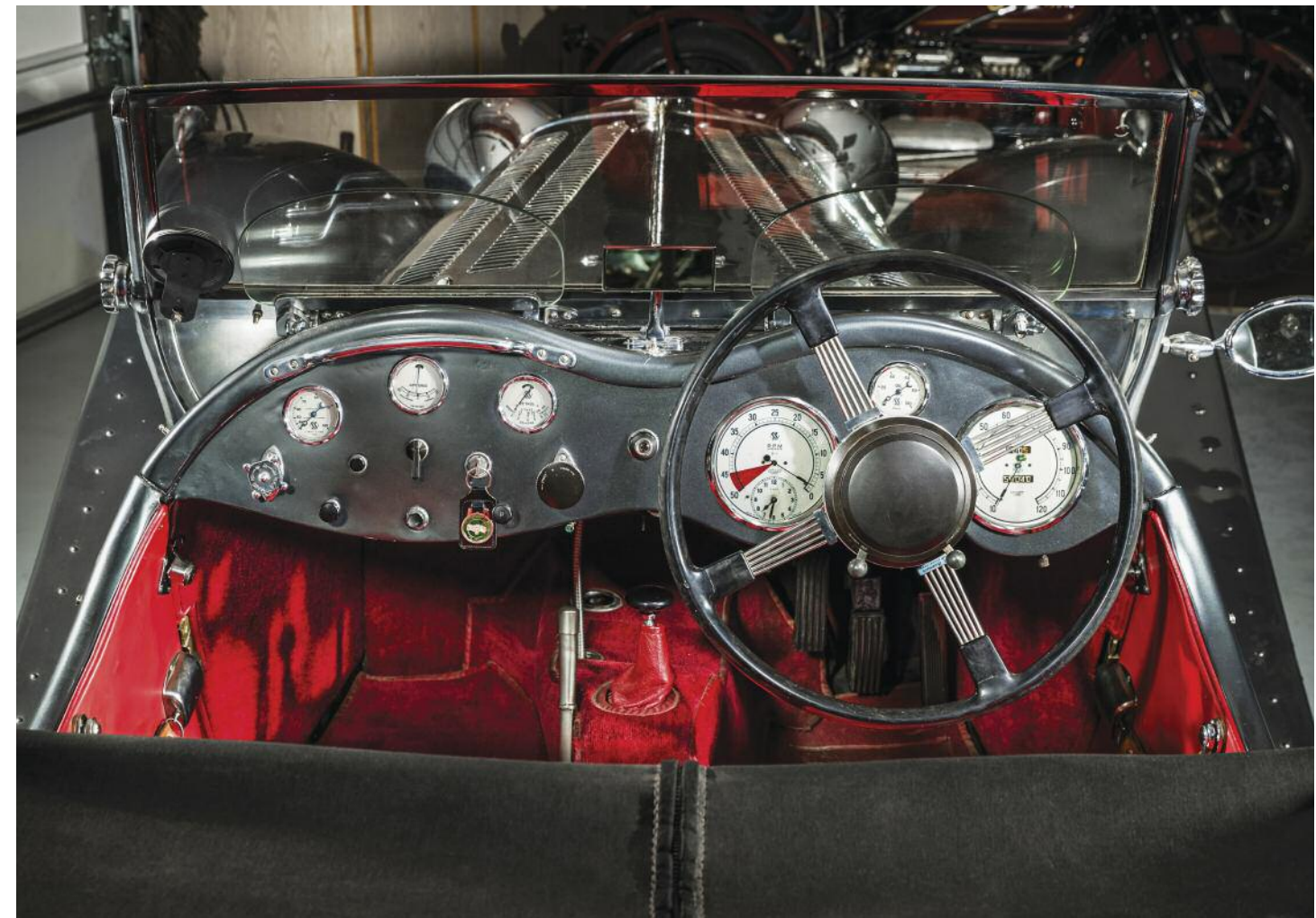
He worked on VWs, too, while getting more established with Jaguars. "I always felt that if I worked hard, did the best I could and treated people fair and honest I could make a living doing what I loved," Larson says. "I would not work for someone I did not like. I could not have the passion to do the work if I did not like the owner."

Home for Them and the Cars in the Foothills

In 1984, they purchased raw land, designing and building their home and shop in Mesa. They sold their other home and built the shop first. At this point, they lived in a motor home and were, with persistence, able to get a loan to build their home.

Because the shop is below ground level, it is cool, quiet and secluded. The walls are 8-inch poured concrete, with 3-foot-wide footings to retain 10 feet of dirt. Cooling ducts are under the floor.

In 1984 he hired Gregg Perry, who is still working with him, intent, as he is, on originality. One of the cars he acquired





1952 Jaguar C-type

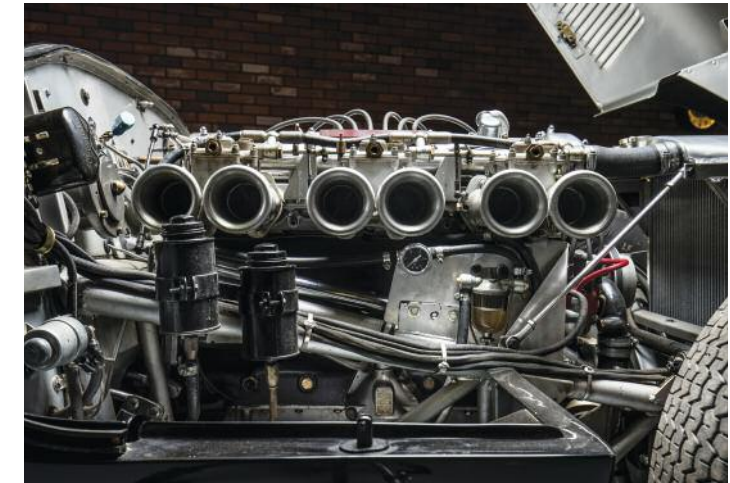
was an XK120 Roadster with 16,000 original miles and original tires, which he still has in unrestored condition. They also bought an E-type roadster with 12,000 miles from the original owner, and an E coupe, with 26,000 miles; they still have those, too.

He restored a 1938 Jaguar SS 100 and sold it at auction, rippling his reputation wider. In 1987, he purchased a C Type, XKC 007, which he sold and restored for a British client. He then acquired a second, XKC 017, which he still owns; he has done many tours and 100-plus races with just one DNF. The following year, he completed a D-type (XKD 552) for a Swiss client, which has competed in the Miglia Millia, Le Mans Historics and other races and tours.

About this time, he was offered XKD 513, which took third at Le Mans in 1957. Larson raced it and did tours in England and Europe.

In the mid to late '80s and '90s, he restored many SS100s, very popular then. The name "SS" was dropped after the war for Jaguars because of the suggestion of the Nazi group, with which the marque never had association.

In 1997, he restored the prototype SS 90 for a Swiss client, the forerunner of the SS100 and the first two-seater ever built by Jaguar. In 1998, the car placed second in class to the best of show-winning Bugatti at Pebble Beach. A dozen years later, the owner returned the car to the event and won his class and two other awards, the Montagu de Beaulieu Trophy for the most significant car of British origin, and the Ian Callum Award for the most innovative design.



During the '90s, he and Darlene attended the C- and D-type factory Cavalcades to Le Mans, where they met Norman Dewis, the automotive legend and Jaguar development test engineer for 34 years, who helped develop and test the original disc brakes.

"When I got home, I called him and asked him if we organized a tour for C- and D-type owners if he would be willing to come over as our guest. The answer was yes, and we have now done the tour for 19 years," Larson says. "He has traveled over here often since then, staying with us at our home. He has become like family."

One day, Larson and Dewis took the E Roadster out, the one he had bought from the original owner. "Norman is



1954 Jaguar XK120 Roadster

always on duty, always listening and checking the car out. He was doing this and as I pulled up to the traffic light I looked at him and laughed," Larson says. "He smiled and said, 'We sure got this one right, didn't we?'"

Patching up Some Health Problems

He didn't let health problems deter him from his cars. In 1997, while driving his XK 140, he was hit by a red-light-running lady, then discovered he had cancer, with lymphatic complications, which resulted in a blood clot.

During this time he was restoring the SS90 prototype for Pebble Beach, he was working on XKC 023, a barn find unknown to exist; he had discovered it the previous year. He found that two other cars were claiming that number. He was eventually able to purchase both of these and reunite the original parts back to the true XKC 023, cleaning up the car's history for the owner.

The same year, he found a lightweight XKE in California, later called "the long-lost lightweight E-type" because it was one of only 12 cars built and the only one that was thought lost. "It was a very busy time," he says.

In 1999, he purchased OKV 2, the lead factory team car for Le Mans in 1954 driven by Moss/ Walker, which was in England. Larson raced it at Goodwood and during the next dozen years, he put 20,000-plus miles on it for many tours and a lot of races. Dewis raced the car twice at Monterey.

Two years later, Larson organized the largest group of C- and D-types in one U.S. location: 24 cars at the JCNA Tennessee event.

"For me, it is almost like these cars have a soul. This soul is much more than its material," he says. "It includes everyone

involved in the design, manufacture, testing, development and everything surrounding the car's history."

Prowling out to the Garage

Let's take a look at some of those Jags with great soul:

•**1938 Jaguar SS100 3 ½-litre** — Chassis # 39077 is one of 118 cars built; fewer than 100 are known to exist. Considered by many the ultimate pre-war Jaguar, the six-cylinder with a four-speed sits on a box section chassis with leaf springs and Girling shocks. Top speed is 101.12 mph. The car has 58,000 original miles.

The Larsons purchased this pre-war beauty in 1991 and have taken it to San Diego, where it fared well in 108 degrees, and up the California coast through wine country.

"They are great cars to drive and look at," he says. "This is the model that really brought Jaguar solidly into the sports car world."

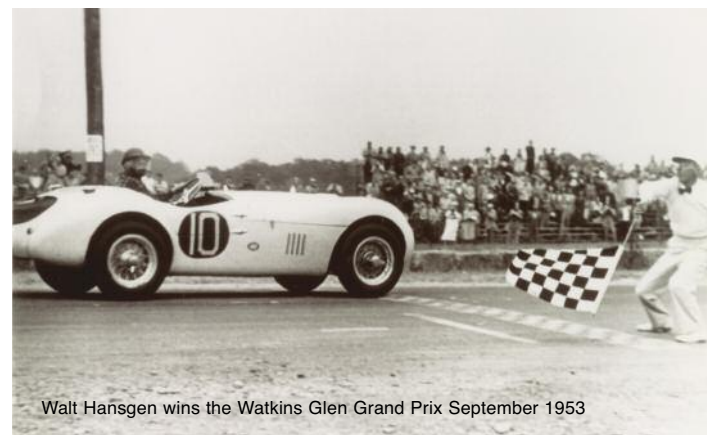
•**1952 Jaguar C-type** — Chassis # XKC 017 carries a six-cylinder DOHC 3 ½ liter wet sump engine and a four-speed and includes independent front suspension with wishbones and torsion bars.

Built to race, the C-type did, winning Le Mans twice, 1951 and 1953, setting records doing so. In the first win, for example, the winning car was 77 miles ahead of the second-place car at the finish line. In the second year, the model became the first car to race at Le Mans with disc brakes and a rubber aircraft fuel bag.

Sterling Edwards, one of the originators of the Pebble Beach Road Race and the SCCA, was the first owner. He was



1953 Hansgen Jaguar

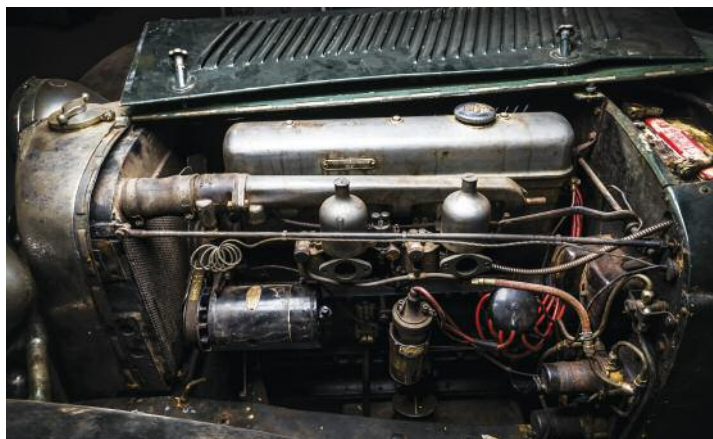


Walt Hansgen wins the Watkins Glen Grand Prix September 1953





The C Type at the Sacramento Fairgrounds October 1955



followed by a number of racing owners, who won a variety of races and concours events.

The Larsons purchased the classic Jag in 1987, and Terry has raced it more than 100 times with just one DNF. They drove it in the first Copperstate 1000 in 1989 in Arizona.

“The C-type is one of the world’s truly great race cars and great fun on the track,” he says. “It likes to brake in a straight line, set up for the corner, turn in to the apex while accelerating and drift through the turn.”

•**1954 Jaguar XK120 Roadster** — The Larsons purchased Chassis #S675445 in 1988 with 16,000 original miles and the original tires. Lyons and Bill Heynes designed the dual-overhead-cam six-cylinder engine for the model while they did fire-watch duty during World War II in heavily bombed Coventry. The car has not been restored and the original engine runs flawlessly. A four-speed provides the gearing.

The couple has put up more than 28,000 miles on trips to Australia and Tasmania, Arizona, Montana and Canada. One stateside trip was during record desert heat at 122 degrees and caught in a serious snowstorm at 9,000 feet. “This car has covered 750 miles in one day and never let us down,” he says.

“Jaguar brought the British sports car world to another level with the showing of the XK120,” Larson says. “The doubts of many who disputed the claim of ‘120 mph’ were laid to rest when a stock XK120 did an official top speed of 132.6 mph, making it ‘the world’s fastest production car.’

They are stylish, comfortable, functional, reliable and great fun to drive.”

•**1966 Jaguar XKE Roadster** — When Enzo Ferrari says that a car is the “most beautiful ever built,” you put your brakes on, stop, listen and look. “Many people remember where they were when they saw their first XKE,” Larson says. “Designed by Malcolm Sayer, it’s most likely made the ‘world’s most beautiful cars’ list more consistently than any other car.”

Chassis # IE11756 is equipped with the 4.2-litre six-cylinder with tri carbs and a four-speed synchronize gearbox, monocoque body, rack and pinion steering and disc brakes.

The Larsons put it under their roof in 1987, purchased from the original owner with 12,000 miles and a never-used spare. Unrestored, it now has 28,000 miles.

“We’ve done many thousands of miles and many tours including the Going to the Sun Montana Tour,” Larson says. “These cars drive and feel much more modern than they actually are.”

Darlene has used two different XKEs as daily drivers to Phoenix.

•**1958 Lister Jaguar (Factory Team Car)** — Only 12 of these knobly-bodied Lister Jaguars were built, and chassis #BHL 119 is the only surviving factory team car of this body type. Jaguar won the 24 Hours of Le Mans five times in the ‘50s and decided to suspend its racing program to keep up with

production demand, Larson explains.

The car is “knobly” because of its curvaceous exterior, a result of the effort to lower the frontal area as much as possible.

This Lister Jaguar was built in 1958 and was the last works knobly built. Brian Lister and Jaguar were friends, so the racer received D Type engines and gearboxes. Lyons even provided the services of Dewis to help test and develop the Lister.

Cousin to the C- and D-types, the Listers were very successful. “In the early ‘50s the car to beat was the C-type, mid ‘50s it was the D-type and late ‘50s it was the Lister Jaguar,” Larson says.

Lister’s close friend, Archie Scott Brown, won 12 of the 14 races with a Lister Jaguar in its maiden season in 1957, including the prestigious British Empire Cup.

Walt Hansgen, who won one of his four consecutive SCAA national championships in another Lister Jaguar. Ivor Bueb and Bruce Halford also won at events such as Silverstone Grand Prix, Snetterton Vanwall Trophy, Brands Hatch & Goodwood.

The Larsons’ car spent some time in the US in the ‘60s before returning to the U.K. in 1970. During the next several decades, their car was raced extensively and is considered as the most successful Lister of that time.

Terry has raced the car in several events and driven it on the Jaguar C- and D-type Tour. It has competed in many races in the U.S. such as Coronado, Laguna Seca, Willow Springs, Buttonwillow, Thunderhill, Las Vegas, Firebird, Sears Point,

Lime Rock, Mont Tremblant in Canada, Le Mans in France and others.

“The Lister lays more flat in the corners and feels very neutral without oversteer or understeer,” he says. “Any car guy will find the view over the bonnet exhilarating!”

•**1953 Hansgen Jaguar** — The great driver, Walt Hansgen, started his remarkable racing career, including SCCA National Champion four years running in the ‘50s, with this car.

“He could not afford a Jaguar C Type, so he designed, built and raced this tube-frame, aluminum-body car using the mechanics of his Jaguar XK120. He raced this car very successfully, including an outright win at Watkins Glen in 1953.

Hansgen lent the car to a friend, Paul Timmins, who raced it very successfully, including second at Cumberland in July 1953. Walt sold the car to Paul Timmins in March 1954, and he and successive owners campaigned it, for instance, at the Mt. Equinox Hill climb in 1979. It was the Jaguar Clubs of North America National Champion in 1989 and was in the museum at Watkins Glen for a few years.

Larson still races it. “I found the car very comparable and in fact competitive with the C-type,” he says. “The Hansgen Jaguar handles extremely well — better than expected.”

If you or someone you know has a GreatGarage and would like it to be considered for an upcoming issue, please e-mail us at info@highline-autos.com.