



Picture: Paul Skilleter

Saving history

Part 2: LWK 707 is one of the most historic XK 120s in existence, having broken International endurance speed records at Montlhéry back in 1952. After it was damaged last year, CMC has painstakingly restored it

Words: Paul Skilleter Pictures: CMC except where stated

LWK 707 is a survivor. First, it escaped without serious injury during its seven days and seven nights endurance run at Montlhéry – this was when travelling at well over 100mph a rear tyre shredded in the dark on the banking... It severed the main battery lead which almost led to disaster because its driver, Jack Fairman, was plunged into darkness; but he managed to retrieve the situation and the record attempt continued.

Then, alone amongst other works XK 120s that achieved distinction in record-breaking or racing, LWK 707 was kept by Jaguar for posterity, eventually passing into the collection of what is now known as Jaguar Heritage. But even in retirement there are risks, and the famous old car has had a couple of narrow squeaks, the last being at the Goodwood Festival of Speed in July 2008, when it was damaged while on a demonstration run up the hill. Classic Motor Cars of Bridgnorth was retained by Jaguar Heritage to put the old girl straight, and it's this work we've been following, and which will be concluded here.

Getting back on track

We left the car last month with the panel-work pretty much complete, and here we record the later stages of the repairs, which have centred on retaining as much originality as possible. As described last month, it was partly for this reason that the body was not removed from the chassis, even though the latter needed some work in the vicinity of the engine mountings. But this still meant a considerable amount of work on the many components that needed to be removed – and which it would have been silly not to have overhauled while they were accessible.

Remarkably, up until last year LWK had retained most of its original paint. But with the effect of sunlight over the years, plus localised blowing-in after minor damage, it had become verging on unsightly, so it was decided that finally, new paintwork was required. The job was delegated by CMC to its favoured paintshop, Body Beautiful Cars, also of Bridgnorth.

In consultation with CMC and Jaguar Heritage, it was agreed that LWK should be finished in

cellulose, which was the original type of paint used, as Jaguar changed over to synthetic in the summer of 1952, some while after LWK was built. Painter Alex Fletcher found it quite difficult to obtain the tinters required to reproduce the original bronze, but eventually a satisfactory match was made to those areas of original British Domolac paint that had remained unfaded.

For durability, though, modern primers were used before three coats of cellulose (50 per cent paint, 50 per cent thinners) were applied – no clear-over-base, of course, as both the metallic element and the colour were contained in the cellulose itself. After being allowed to settle, the cellulose was flatted before being followed by three further coats. Further hand flattening and polishing produced the required end result, care being taken to avoid too much of a high gloss – though it was pointed out that being cellulose, any initial brightness would wear off anyway.

Having seen the car in the middle stages of its restoration, front wing off and looking a little sorry for itself, I was fully aware of the huge contrast



1

Catching up: in Part One we covered the main body repairs needed; the work carried out by Tim Griffin of CMC, pictured examining the car here



7

A dramatic stage in the painting process was when next this gloss red oxide paint with a matt controller was applied to the primed body



2

The wishbone front suspension was largely undamaged but was stripped down, crack-tested, and rebuilt with new bushes and balljoints as required



3

Even though this was only a partial rebuild, much detail work was needed. This is the lock mechanism from the offside door about to be refurbished, one of many sub-assemblies given attention



4

Meanwhile the repaired bodyshell was being made ready for the paintshop, with localised stripping revealing old minor repairs. The old paint, most of it dating back to 1952, was then stripped from the entire body; here the bootlid is being tackled



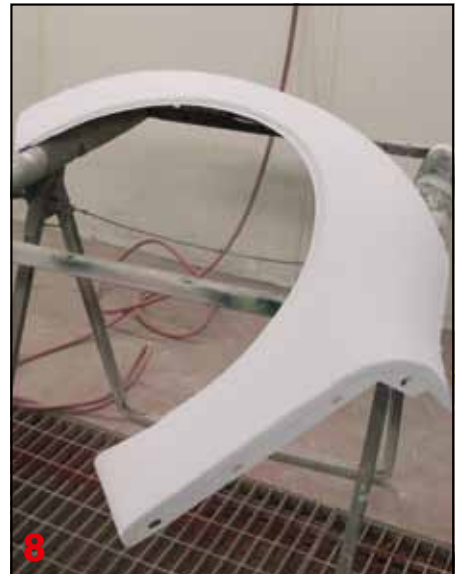
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Finally the car was ready for handing over to Alex Fletcher of Body Beautiful Cars Ltd, who had been entrusted by CMC to carry out the refinishing



6

Unlike a full restoration, where the bare bodyshell would be painted, LWK 707's interior remained in situ, requiring Alex to mask off all areas to be protected from overspray. Although the final coats would be cellulose, to prevent sinking and reaction a non-permeable epoxy coat was applied first, followed by a two-pack primer



8

The rear wings – even the undamaged nearside one – had to be removed for painting separately (above), as a beading lies between wing and body that can't be masked off satisfactorily. The same applied to the bonnet (below) which also cannot be painted while on the car





9

This is the car just after the basic painting process had been completed, ready for fitting-up with the engine, transmission and all the other items which had been removed. Note the driver's door – at first it was thought that the original was a write-off, but it was retrieved along with its trim panel and wood



11

The engine bay with repairs to the inner wing invisible and many of the minor components replaced ahead of refitting the engine



12

The engine – rebuilt at Whitley – back in the car



10

Tim Griffin's wife Louise is an artist, which was highly useful when it came to recreating the BRDC badge carried on LWK 707's door! Her professional name is Louise Southan



13

The gearbox, refitted along with the engine, seen from the cockpit. The original plywood floor was found to be in good condition



14

Goodwood, 17 September 2009, and LWK 707, finished just in time, is unloaded at the circuit



Picture: Paul Skilleter

Clearly, no signs of the damage sustained a few miles away near Goodwood House in 2008... Body panels on the rebuilt side of the car are completely straight



The engine bay looks a little cleaner but is otherwise virtually indistinguishable from its pre-accident state

Picture: Paul Skilleter



Fortunately the car's original 1952 boot modifications, with the auxiliary fuel tank installed for the 1952 Montlhéry run, were almost untouched and did not need major attention

Picture: Paul Skilleter



Picture: Paul Skilleter

Nothing to show that the accident damage had extended into the cockpit. The seat leather had been replaced some time before, incidentally

when at the Goodwood Revival meeting last September I watched the beautifully repaired car emerge from its closed container after its journey from Bridgnorth. The first task was to get it to the recreated Earls Court show hall where it would be on display outside; this was a set-up day and to do this entailed taking it the wrong way round the circuit. Tony O'Keeffe of Jaguar Heritage backed LWK away and parked it up, but then said, "You drive it!" So, aside from those few yards, I became the first person outside CMC to drive the old warrior after its restoration.

It had been some time since I drove an XK 120 – which was a couple of years ago when I re-sampled my own roadster – but it was all very familiar, legs outstretched and with what is now

A Stirling parade

As Paul has related, LWK 707 is a very significant XK, and it had a significant part to play in the 2009 Goodwood Revival too as one of the cars in the Sir Stirling Moss parade.

After Paul's opportunity to drive LWK the wrong way around Goodwood on the Thursday, I was lucky enough to have the chance to drive it the right way around during the parade on the Sunday. As is almost inevitable with these things there was a lot of waiting as the participating cars were assembled into the right order, followed by a stop-start lap after which we all lined up on the grid and Sir Stirling was presented with a birthday cake! After that came four uninterrupted laps of Goodwood, and a chance to stretch LWK's legs just a little, lights ablaze of course...

As Paul found the car was, as expected, a delight to drive, but what was more pleasing still was seeing the overwhelmingly warm reception it received from the huge crowd (which was certainly nothing to do with its occupants!). There were pointed fingers aplenty each time the XK lapped, and whenever I passed the car later in the day – it was parked outside the entrance to the 'Earls Court Motor Show' – a steady stream of people were posing to have their picture taken beside it.

A very special car then is LWK 707, and thanks to the recent work carried out, it will continue to be very special for many years yet.

Matt Skelton



Back in action! LWK 707 mobile once more, at the Goodwood Revival meeting in September last year, taking part in the parade of some 80 cars associated with Sir Stirling Moss's 80 years [see boxout]. He was one of its drivers during the 10,000 miles at over 100mph endurance feat at Montlhéry in 1952

Picture: Chris Hope

regarded as an outsize steering wheel to grasp, elbows bent. Engine and clutch are standard so smooth getaways are easy, provided you don't smoothly reverse by accident – first and reverse are very close on the Moss gearbox. These boxes vary a lot in their feel and in the effectiveness of their synchromesh (on second, third and top only), but LWK's appeared fine, with reasonably strong synchromesh and no excessive whine in first.

I've only ever driven round Goodwood the 'right' way, so going the other way felt a bit odd, but the circuit in reverse is, I can assure you, quite entertaining! On the move, LWK's acceleration was brisk and the car felt perky, the engine having been rebuilt by Jaguar's engineers at Whitley. The steering and suspension felt pretty much as taut

as a standard XK 120's is ever going to feel, the similarly original drum brakes appeared as good as they are going to get and, all in all, I'd have been happy to have motored off to Scotland in LWK that same day.

Yes, LWK is a Jaguar cat that has used up a few of its nine lives, but it now seems set to motor on into the new century in good health – and in the New World too, because I've heard that it will be seen at Pebble Beach this summer, as part of a special Jaguar display in honour of the marque's 75th year. It's sure not going to let the side down...

Thanks to: Jaguar heritage (www.jdht.com) and CMC (www.classic-motor-cars.co.uk)