

CLASSIC DRIVER



Jack Sears - Driving the GTO, 3.8 Jaguar and Ford Galaxie in the Sixties

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Charles Harbord, the Editor of 'Cars for the Connoisseur' interviews 'Gentleman Jack' Sears who, during a racing career spanning fifteen years from 1950 to 1965 drove a diversity of cars for a variety of entrants, including BMC, Brian Lister, Equipe Endeavour, John Willment, John Coombs, Carroll Shelby and Team Lotus. These extracts from the August issue explain Sears' introduction to the Aston Martin DB4GT, Ford Galaxie and Ferrari GTO.



Jack Sears - At the end of 1958 Tommy Sopwith, who had been a great adversary but also a great friend, had decided he would actually stop driving himself and asked me to take his place in 1959 with the 3.4 litre Jaguar saloon. BMC allowed me to do one or two races which didn't conflict with anything they had at the time - He had raced under the name of Equipe Endeavour - Endeavour being the name of his father's famous J Class yachts with which he had contested the America Cup before the war - and for 1960 invited Michael Parkes and I to drive for him. I accepted with alacrity and huge enthusiasm when I heard that the cars were to be the new 3.8 litre Mk II Jaguar and DB4GT Aston Martin, the latter being the fastest car I had driven up to then.

Charles Harbord - *But you also drove one of the first E Type Jaguars for Tommy?*

JS - Yes, that was the following year when we also had the Ferrari 250 SWB Berlinetta which was actually shared with Ronnie Hoare of Maranello Concessionaires.

CH - *Quite a mouth-watering collection of cars. How would you rate them in retrospect?*



JS -Well, first of all the 3.8 litre was a vast improvement on the 3.4 which had a narrow rear track with tricky handling. We were getting 140 mph but even the standard production 3.8 was good for 125 mph - pretty amazing for a full five seater saloon in those days. The DB4 GT was the not only the fastest car I had driven but was beautifully balanced, although the real sensation was the E Type with which Graham Hill had won on its maiden appearance at Oulton Park from Roy Salvadori in John Coombs's entry. I drove this car for Tommy later in the season. It was lighter and faster than the Aston - over 150 mph - and easier to drive with bags of torque. I only did one race in the Ferrari but that was a terrific car - probably the best of the lot. I was lucky to have driven those particular cars and had three happy years with Tommy and Mike Parkes. The main opposition came from the Coombs team with Graham Hill and Roy Salvadori, Sir Gawaine Baillie, and Peter Berry with Bruce McLaren behind the wheel of his 3.8.



It was a bitterly cold winter that January February March of 1963 - one of the coldest winters on record, and the frost went 18 inches into the ground. It was below freezing every day for two and a half months and farming came to a standstill. An extraordinary weather pattern. One day in February when I was doing nothing - the shooting season was over - the telephone rang and it was Jeff Uren - my old adversary, who used to race his Zephyr against my Austin 105, he said "Listen, John

Willment (who I knew) has started a big Ford dealership with a chain of garages down in the Twickenham area. He wants to form a racing team to promote his garages with me as team manager". So I said "Congratulations, well done Jeff I'm really pleased for you".

"Well" he said, "I've always admired you as a driver and we are going to import a NASCAR Ford Galaxie, the regulations are common to the British Saloon Car Championship so we don't have to carry out any modifications to it. It will be a Holman and Moody prepared true NASCAR model built by John Holman at their place in North Carolina. It will be a ground up race car, not a converted street car." I said "Jeff, you will never stop the thing!" Remembering only two or three years previously Dan Gurney with a Chevrolet Impala when the wheel came off at Silverstone and he retired whilst leading the Jaguars. He said "It's got drum brakes but with metal to metal linings - they won't fade, and later in the year they are going to homologate disc brakes on the front." "Well can I try it?" "No, it's not even in this country yet, but I need an answer within the next 24 hours because the decision to buy the car rather hinges on whether or not you will drive it."

CH - *It was to be a single entry?*

JS - Single entry. So 24 hours or rather less later I rang back. "All right Jeff, I'll take a gamble on it." So I became a works driver for John Willment.

Then come May and the Galaxie arrives in time for the Daily Express International Trophy meeting at Silverstone - I always remember looking at this massive thing which had road tyres on it as the Firestone racing tyres wouldn't be available till the Friday, this was in the days when it was Thursday and Friday practice with the race on Saturday, so I said to Jeff Uren "Look, let me just take the car around the circuit for a couple of laps on the road tyres - I won't go quickly." He said "For Christ's sake it's quite unstable on those tyres, but I quite understand that you want to just get the feel of it." So it was agreed that I would do just three laps. I did the first lap quite gently, changed gears a few times to get the feel of the gearbox and tried the brakes. The second lap was a bit faster and the third lap was the slowing down lap but I did give it a bit of a boot full coming out of Becketts and immediately burst a rear tyre - I had to park on the grass on the inside of the Hangar Straight and wait for the session to be over, while of course the Jaguars are going by blowing their horns in triumph, not knowing what the problem was. Anyway the car was retrieved with red faces all round, the press having a field day, but next day the tyres arrive from America and I go out and get pole position.



CH - *So you came to terms with the handling very quickly?*

JS - Yes, and I found the brakes worked surprisingly well. Not quite as good as the Jaguar discs but they weren't bad at all with no fade.

CH - *Such a vast car it must have felt quite different to anything else you had driven.*

JS - Totally, and it was left hand drive with which I hadn't had much experience. The other thing I hadn't realised was that the clutch was not suitable for a standing start. After two practice starts it was totally burnt out. It took a telephone call to John Holman in North Carolina to be reminded that over there they do rolling starts. They changed the clutch overnight and I was instructed to ease the car off the line and not to turn on the power until the clutch was home. The flag comes down - and here we are at the moment of truth! So I made a gentle start and of course I was fourth into the first corner with three Jaguars in front of me - Sir Gawaine Baillie, Roy Salvadori and Graham Hill. I followed them down to Becketts and heading down Hangar Straight I gave it the full 450 bhp and went past the three of them in one go. Then came the braking point at Stowe and I thought this is where they'll come rushing by me under braking, I must just concentrate on my line and see what happens. And to my surprise they didn't come past me, so I accelerated out of Stowe down to Club, had a look in the mirror and they were sufficiently far behind not to harass me very much as we braked for Club; as we went up to the very fast Abbey in those days, towards the wood store, I glanced in the mirror and they were 100 yards behind! I thought fantastic I've really got the measure of these cars and when I was about five or six seconds ahead I slowed down to their speed and maintained that lead, and won the race, which I think was about twenty laps - sixty miles, taking fastest lap in the process.

So that of course broke the Jaguar domination, but people said that's all very well, Silverstone is a very fast circuit ideal for the Galaxie, it's going to be different at Crystal Palace or the short circuit at Brands, but it wasn't and I was never beaten in the Galaxie by a Jaguar.

CH - *Did you remain the only person racing Galaxie?*

JS - No, Gawaine Baillie ordered one for '63 but his hadn't come through - that's why he drove the Jaguar until its arrival a little later in the season. Then Alan Brown bought one and he got Grand Prix drivers to drive his. I had a great duel with Dan Gurney in Galaxies at Silverstone the following year in '64. I like Dan very much and respected him hugely - he was a very fast driver and he had more experience with these American saloons, so this was a big test for me - Anyhow I did beat him which gave me enormous pleasure.

CH - *So for the rest of that season you just drove the Galaxie?*

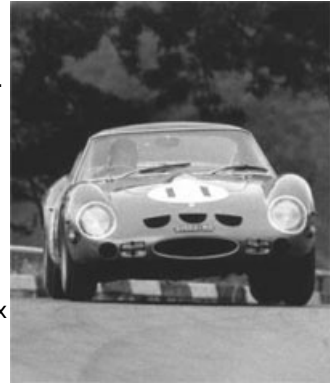
JS - Yes, until I drove a Cortina again right at the very end of the season when Colin Chapman announced the Lotus Cortina which he and Ford wanted to run in the last round of the championship at Oulton Park. In fact by then I had already won the championship and John Willment released me to drive the Lotus Cortina and put Graham Hill behind the wheel of the Galaxie. In the race I won my class ahead of the Jaguars and finished second behind Graham in the Galaxie. So ended a season that saw me drive and win the first race in a Cortina car ever in the world, win the first race in a Ford Galaxie ever to be seen in the UK and won the first race in a Lotus Cortina which had never been seen before on the race track, so I reckon 1963 was a pretty special year for me.

CH - *Having started off quite inauspiciously?*

JS - Yes, and with some trepidation as to whether I had really made the right decision to drive for Willment. I haven't mentioned that John Willment released me to drive for other teams that year including 250 GTO Ferraris for John Coombs and Maranello Concessionaires and the 330 LMB Ferrari, which I shared with Michael Salmon, at Le Mans when we finished fifth overall for Col. Ronnie Hoare.

CH - *How would you compare those two Ferraris - I believe the 330 LMB was a prototype?*

JS - Four were made including a right hand drive version for Ronnie Hoare. Of the other three I believe Ferrari France had one, Ferrari North America had one and I can't remember where the last one went. Those three entered Le Mans but Mike Salmon and I were the only ones to finish and Ronnie was absolutely thrilled. Although the LMB was 4 litres compared to the GTO with 3 it was no more powerful except perhaps for an improvement in mid range torque, the top speed on the Mulsanne Straight being an identical 175 mph. It had a rather slow 4 speed gearbox compared with the excellent 5 speed 'box of the GTO which handled much better on tighter circuits. At Le Mans I would consider them comparable but at Brands Hatch the GTO was



about two seconds quicker. This was proved shortly after Le Mans in the Guards Trophy where John Coombs asked me to drive his GTO and Lorenzo Bandini took over the same LMB. In practice we swapped cars (with permission from the Clerk of the Course) and immediately I realised I would be slower through the corners which was confirmed by the stop watch. What did please me was the fact that I was quicker than Bandini - a current Formula 1 driver. In the race I won the GT category and finished 4th overall behind the sports - prototypes while I believe Bandini was 10th.

This (edited) interview forms just part of the contents of the August 2003 issue of 'Cars for the Connoisseur'. Other articles include Anthony Hussey's experiences on the recent Coppa Milano - San Remo Rally, an obituary of the great American sportsman Briggs Cunningham, part two of celebrated car dealer Adrian Hamilton's reminiscences - 'Hammy's Highlights', and much more!

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