

CLASSIC DRIVER

Jaguar's head of advanced design - what does design mean to Jaguar?



Julian Thompson, the man behind the design team responsible for the avant-garde R-D6, was one of the speakers at the automotive sector of D&AD's 'Yellow Pencil' awards; commonly known as the 'Creative Industry Oscars'. Set in London's Billingsgate, the evening gave some insights into design, and the designer's relationship with customers and the press.

With a Lamborghini Gallardo parked outside the building it was appropriate that this particular model should be cited by Thompson (Chief Designer, Advanced Designs for Jaguar Cars) as one of his favourite modern cars (he also admits to a fondness for old Ferraris, but he's more a 'modern' man). He was following a presentation by Autocar Magazine's Editor-in-Chief Steve Cropley who gave some recent examples of manufacturer's design policy impacting on sales and their relationship with the motoring press. The Ford Motor Company, outraged at the universal condemnation of one of its Escort variants, pulled its advertising from Autocar for 12 months before realising that the points made were valid, and that its design team should be aware of criticism and act accordingly. The result was some superb - if not '*Classic Driver*' - cars from Ford and the entire FOMOCO group including Jaguar, Range Rover and Volvo. Good communications between Press, Public and Manufacturer were vital - witness the open discussion regarding Renault's dramatic 21st Century styling and the widespread critical panning of BMW under Chris Bangle's artistic direction.

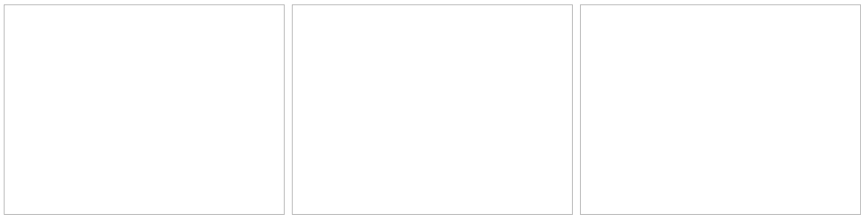
Anyway, Julian Thompson was there to explain just a little about how the big manufacturers go about creating a 'look' for the entire model range and just how far ahead his team would work, usually 10 years or so in advance. He "Tries not to get too romantic about the past" and believes his mission is as much to identify, safeguard and develop Jaguar's core British values in a contemporary way, as it is to actually pen the design. Values such as 'Spirit + Passion', 'Rebellion', 'Humour' and 'Glamour, Romance and Charm' can all be subdivided into categories with uniquely British (and Jaguar) overtones with imagery from Paul Smith, Vivienne Westwood and Sean Connery. This is what they will be tapping into for inspiration and direction - the inlaid Union flag on the air outlet of the R-D6 for example.

When questioned why the current S-type did not have the Jaguar 'family' look Thompson smiled, excused himself with the inevitable 'before my time' (he has worked for Audi, Seat, Lamborghini, Bentley and Bugatti), and stated this is unlikely to happen in the future as purchasers now prefer to buy into a recognised formula of styling. When Sir William Lyons produced the MkI and II they looked like no other Jaguar, they were just right for the time.

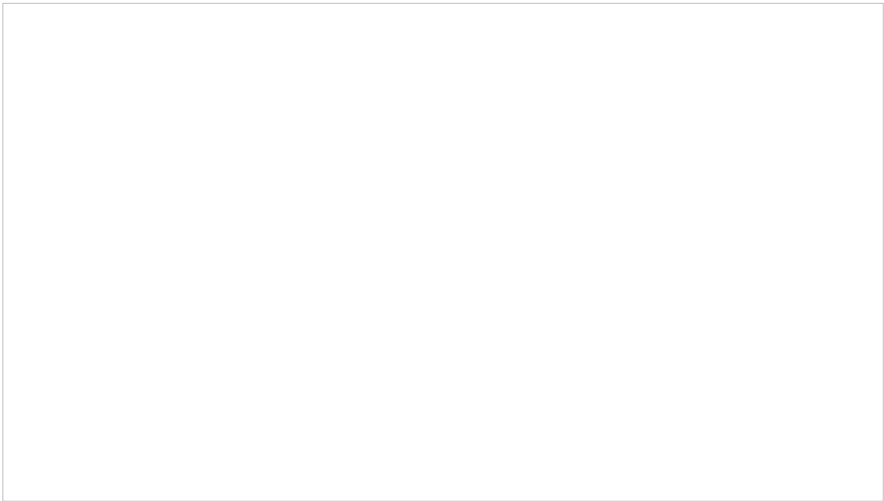
And Jaguars of the future? They will be interesting and innovative with a nod to the past but nothing more.

It's the last European brand that Ford needs to complete a final makeover, having rescued it from dire financial straights, and also having done such a superb job from a styling and quality viewpoint at Volvo, Aston Martin and Range Rover. The new XJ saloon is universally feted and is the first of these new projects to see the light of day.

The Jaguar R-D6 -



Outside Billingsgate looking towards Tower Bridge -



Text - Steve Wakefield
Photos - Jaguar/Classic Driver/D&AD

Gallery

