

CLASSIC DRIVER

Jaguars loose in London



It's not what you usually see in the Inner Circle of London's exclusive park and Zoological Gardens - the prototype 'D', as practiced at Le Mans in 1954, and the 1956 yellow ex-Ecurie Francorchamps car together for a little light use by one of Jaguar's original works drivers, Sir Stirling Moss.

The occasion was organised by Chris Routledge of Coys who arranged the Belgian car, and tied in neatly with the presence of XKC401 (note, as a prototype car it still carried the 'C' suffix) in London for this week's MPH06 Classic - generously loaned by the Jaguar Daimler Heritage Trust. Sir Stirling was on hand for a couple of 'laps', and your Editor took the wheel too, more of which later.

These were two of the most correct and original D-types around. Plagued by the propensity for crashed cars' monocoque and front subframe to be separated (let alone engines), thus ensuring two cars claiming the same chassis number, the green prototype car has always been owned by Jaguar, while XKD573 had been prepared by the factory for the famous Ecurie Francorchamps to run two drivers at Le Mans in 1956 where it finished an impressive fourth overall in the hands of team patron Jacques Swaters and Frenchman Freddy Rousselle. The car soon passed into the long term ownership of a Jaguar enthusiast who has owned it to this day.



Sir Stirling's involvement with Jaguar started in 1950 with the drive in the Tourist Trophy that really launched his career, and ended as an official driver in 1954, again at the TT. Along the way the C-type brought him many victories and was in fact a far more successful type for him, the later car retiring at Le Mans, Reims and Dundrod in '54.

With both cars sitting in the dappling autumn sunlight, the photocall demanded an escorted drive around the park's Inner Circle, and with Moss behind the wheel of the yellow car and Michael Quinn driving the JDHT prototype it was a stirring sight that met not only the assembled media but also taxi drivers, passers-by and bemused tourists out for a walk, the barking straight-sixes cutting across the normally tranquil greenery.



It's not often you can say Steve Wakefield then replaced Stirling Moss behind the wheel but hey, why not this time?! Pop open the pint-size door on the driver's side and jump into the seat, gently easing legs under the big wooden-rimmed wheel and you're there. Starting is via button and a touch of throttle and the car is easy to click into first (via the forward-sloping gear lever we've all gazed at in paddocks worldwide), depress the stiff clutch and off you go.

Given the circumstances, perhaps this was not the time to really test the car's performance but suffice it say once 3,000rpm had been cleared the engine pulls lustily and I can imagine it being a matter of getting into as high a gear as possible and just keep on going using the torquey motor and a drifting driving technique to hustle the surprisingly small car around a circuit. Dream on Wakefield.



A unique occasion and a special 'thank you' to Chris Routledge of [Coys](#) for putting it all on.

Text: Steve Wakefield

Photos: Coys/Classic Driver

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