

# CLASSIC DRIVER

## Driven: Jaguar C-type 'XKC 015'



As grainy b/w period photographs suggest, you really do place one hand on the rear deck of a C-type while stepping carefully onto a chassis cross-member and sliding into the cloth-covered bucket seat. It's that easy.

I've never driven a 'C' before, so, having briefly sampled a **D-type**, and covered a few miles in a **Ferrari 166MM** (the **Jaguar's** contemporary), I was expecting the experience to be a mix of the two: British 'Cold War' technology running under *Barchetta*-type bodywork, a lusty 3.4-litre straight-six replacing the sublime, **Colombo**-designed, 1995cc V12.

Which it sort of was. If you conveniently ignore the surprisingly torquey motor from **Ferrari**, and the state-of-the-art, **DOHC Jaguar** six with its alloy head and twin **SU** carburettors, that is.

Things are never as simple as they seem.



The cockpit is fine for two, although your passenger will have to hop over his side of the car, as there's only a driver's door. It feels roomier than the **166**, and this time the big **Bakelite** wheel comfortably clears my legs. Pedal-wise, you'd be advised to wear driving shoes – it's the clutch that's the tightest of the three.

But, ergonomically speaking, everything's to hand and, looking around the nicely aged bare metal, cloth and textured fabric interior, there's a touch of the **Supermarine Swift** about it. It's straight off the set of *The Sound Barrier*, or the deck of a **Royal Navy** carrier on exercises in the **Black Sea**.

The engine is started first with key and then button. As the side-exhaust is routed along the passenger's side there's a pleasant rasping crackle (you can see and hear the car in action in RM's promotional video at the foot of the page) but it doesn't wear or annoy.



The steering is superb; delicate and with tremendous feel. As **World Champion-to-be Phil Hill** said of his first **C-type** experience, "The steering was light – almost scary light. It was the first car I ever drove that had a really precise feel about it – it felt like a racing car." So manoeuvring the small car is a cinch. You won't build up the biceps in a **C-type**.

Neither will you exercise your leg muscles much, as the clutch is as road-friendly as can be – although the long-throw gearlever does require a bit of 'rowing'. Having said that, once over 2250rpm or so, the flexible engine pulls strongly up to a (self-imposed) 5500rpm limit. It's in an 'as-delivered' state of tune. That's 210bhp, on twin SUs and drum brakes rather than the sort of rocket-ship, triple-Weber/discs potential we've all seen on the historic racing circuit in recent years.





And none the worse for that as, after the model's sensational debut win at **Le Mans** in 1951, this is exactly how private-owner **C-types** were enthusiastically campaigned worldwide in the early 50s.

Drivers such as **Duncan Hamilton** and **Ian Stewart** in the UK, and **Phil Hill**, **John Fitch** and the brilliant **Masten Gregory** from **Kansas City, Missouri** in the United States; all shone in the **C-type** during this period, building on Jaguar's sales success with the (ostensibly) related **XK120**.

This car, chassis **XKC 015**, was driven by **Masten Gregory** throughout 1953 and will be offered for sale by **RM Auctions** on October 27 at its '**Automobiles of London**' sale. Although coming with current **FIA** and **HTP** paperwork, it's been mainly used for prestigious road tours in recent years and a few laps of the 'circuit' surrounding **RM's** storage facility in eastern England reveals a very usable thoroughbred for a long road tour.



The handling, on period-profile road rubber, was relatively benign. However, watch out for less-than-perfect surfaces which might catch the solid rear-axle/torsion bar set-up out – **Le Mans**, with its relatively smooth layer of bitumen was always the **Coventry** company's priority with its live-axle, **C-** and **D-type** cars.

In summary: superb steering with no wander, kick-back or play at speed; a comfortable driving position (for two); light clutch; a progressive throttle and more than adequate road performance from an original-specification engine; very 'English' patina that belies its clearly excellent mechanical condition; a positive, if

a little wieldy, long-throw gearchange; and drum brakes 'of their day' – **Moss** set a lap record of 105.24mph at the **1951 Le Mans** without discs, note...

And speaking of racing, don't forget that a **Jaguar C-type** is eligible for ALL the events, including the **Goodwood Revival**, the **Monaco Historics** (important as this example is a 1952 car, so a prime sportscar race contender), the **Le Mans Classic** and the **Mille Miglia** retrospective.





None of us is **Stirling Moss**, though. Nor are we **Masten Gregory**. I was envious of the latter's trademark '**Buddy Holly**' specs as the wind battered my features yesterday. It's definitely a goggles and flat 'at sort of car, a fabulous machine to drive over the **Moors** to breakfast in **Whitby**, or in **New England** in the Fall.

Despite just covering a few miles in this car yesterday, the qualities that have made **C-type Jaguars** so desirable as first racing drivers', and now collectors' cars came through. Whoever buys it at the sale will own a very fine motor car.

*The **1952 Jaguar C-type**, chassis **XKC 015**, is estimated to sell for £1,900,000 - 2,400,000 (that's 2,250,000 - 2,850,000 euros, or \$2,940,000 - 3,700,000).*

To read our full preview (with lot list) of the **27 October 'Automobiles of London' auction**, please [CLICK HERE](#).

To see all the entries to the **27 October 'Automobiles of London' auction** in the Classic Driver car database please [CLICK HERE](#).

**Timetable:**

**SALE:**

October 27, 2010  
4:00 PM

**PREVIEW:**

October 26, 2010  
10:00 AM - 5:00 PM  
October 27, 2010  
10:00 AM - 04:00 PM

**'KISS KISS, BANG BANG' DRINKS RECEPTION:**

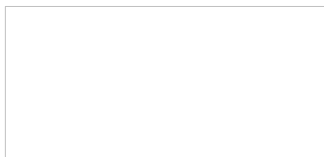
October 26, 2010  
6:30 PM - 8:30 PM GMT  
*Strictly by invitation only.*

**ADMISSION:**

Admission to this event requires the purchase of an official auction catalogue available for £50.00. The catalogue admits two and must be presented at the entrance to the sale to be granted entry.

**AUCTION LOCATION**

Battersea Evolution  
Chelsea Bridge Entrance  
Battersea Park  
London, SW11 4NJ UK



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