
1938 show-stopper: William Lyons' Jaguar SS100 3.5-litre Coupé Prototype

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Visitors to the 1938 Earls Court Motor Show were stunned when the wraps came off a svelte two-seater coupé. Designed by a young, yet to be ennobled William Lyons, the car was the equal of anything from the Continent.

...imagine a 17-year-old Gordon March driving away in this sublime sporting coupé.

It was also expensive: at £595 it was the most costly SS Jaguar ever produced. Lyons, even at 37 ever the businessman, sold the car straight off the stand to a Mr Leo March who bought it for his son.

Which was a generous gesture - imagine a 17-year-old Gordon March driving away in this sublime sporting coupé.



As one would expect, the car was built in Coventry, with hand-beaten aluminium coachwork (from an outside company) carefully fitted to a wooden frame made in-house. Some extra brightwork under the bonnet made it even more special – and these touches can be seen today in the restored car now for sale at [London-based specialist DD Classics](#).

Thankfully, Gordon March survived wartime service in the Royal Air Force, but when hostilities ceased he decided to parted company with his 'Grey Lady' to raise capital for a business venture.



From then on, the elegant coupé was traded between collectors on both sides of the Atlantic, winning the Lord Montagu award for the most significant British car at the 1987 Pebble Beach Concours d'Elegance. By then it had been the subject of a restoration in the UK.

Taking in the lines of the car today, resplendent in its original colour scheme of gunmetal metallic with red leather, what images does it evoke? Well, there's a little Bugatti Atlantic in its profile. And the rear styling clearly signals that of the XK120 Fixed-Head Coupé, announced only a decade or so later.

This SS100 remains a pre-War one-off but, with the benefit of hindsight, the 'Prototype' in its title refers more to the truly great Jaguars of the 1950s.

Photos by Jan Baedeker

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