



Peter Stevens penned the beautiful contours of the XJR-15.

Winner takes all

Tom Walkinshaw has confirmed the rumours that have been buzzing round in motor racing circles for some months. Better still, he has presented and driven the superb JaguarSport XJR-15 at Silverstone, and announced a fabulous series of three races that will support Grands Prix at Monaco, Silverstone and Spa next year. The prize, settled by victory at Spa, will be \$1 million... and there is no second prize. "Winner takes all," says Walkinshaw with a grim smile.

The cars, restyled XJR-9s in effect, will be sold to clients who will undertake to enter them for the Intercontinental Challenge in 1991. Thirty will be built in Kidlington during the winter, and JaguarSport has undertaken to build no more than 50 in total ("We may wish to repeat the racing series in 1992").

Each car will cost £500,000 but that sum will include preparation for the races, mechanics at the events and repairs. Who pays for damage? The customer pays for parts. JaguarSport pays for labour. If the customer has an International racing licence he may take part in the events.

Otherwise he will have to employ a

professional driver and JaguarSport intend to nominate eight world class drivers who'll contest the core of the event, the Intercontinental Challenge. Two will be Europeans, two Japanese, two Australian and two American, and their combined performances will decide the outcome of the challenge. The owner of the winning car will receive a solid silver trophy fashioned in the shape of an XJR-15, the winning driver a silver replica. The owners of the winning cars at Monaco and Silverstone will each receive a JaguarSport XJR-S 6-litre coupé. "These can be regarded as trial runs for the main event, at Spa," says Walkinshaw. "The performances of the eight drivers will count for the Intercontinental Challenge, but the \$1 million is a one-off prize, to the winner of the third race."

The series is reminiscent of the BMW M1 Challenge of 1979-1980, and has the backing of Bernie Ecclestone and FISA. Derek Warwick, already contracted to Silk Cut Jaguar for the 1991 World Sportscar Championship, has already registered for ownership and will take part in the series in his own right; so too will Vern Schuppan, and they'll be hard men to beat.

"They'll be no favouritism," Walkinshaw insists. "We will prepare the cars and take them to the races. They will be as near identical as we can make them. Ideally, the owners will take delivery after Spa, in August, and I'd expect them to be seen in museums and private collections."

The XJR-15 will undoubtedly be an appreciating asset, an investment in other words. It complies with current Group C and IMSA regulations, but has heavy bodywork and tips the scales at 1050kg, or 50kg more than next year's World Championship rules allow. Some may be converted to road-going form but JaguarSport will not be involved in the process, because the XJR-15 would not be eligible for Type Approval.

The car is based, as near as possible, on the XJR-9LM that won at Le Mans in 1988, and the similar XJR-12 which won the 24 hour race this year. It has a composite materials chassis similar to that on the V12-powered racing cars, built by a TWR Group company called ASTEC, based in Derbyshire. The front suspension is inboard, operated by pushrods and rockers, while the rear suspension is faithful to the Le Mans winner with outboard springs and dampers located inside the wheel well.

JaguarSport's 6-litre V12 engine is installed, rated conservatively at "over 450 horsepower". It has dry sump lubrication and is managed by Zytex's electro-



nic ignition system. Although no performance figures are quoted, other than the top speed of 185 mph, it's known that the prototype version which carries Walkinshaw's personal number plate, TOM 4, has been tested and found to reach 60 mph in 3.2 seconds, and 150 mph in 13.5 seconds.

The TWR 6-speed gearbox has not been raced. It was designed and built by the group for this year's Le Mans, using a TWR casing and Hewland VGC straight-cut gears, but was heavier than the March-based 5-speed transmission. When the chicanes were built on the Mulsanne Straight the team decided that they didn't need a 6-speed gearbox, so the design was handed over to the XJR-15 development group.

A triple-plate AP carbon clutch comes from the Group C/IMSA racing cars, but has hydraulic control, and so do the steel brake discs and AP 4-piston calipers. Oz wheels are 17 inches in diameter, and are full racing size.

Impressive as the specification is, the XJR-15 will be regarded as a work of art. The bodywork, entirely new to a design by Peter Stevens, is superbly proportioned, rounded where racing cars tend to have functional contours, and has more glass or perspex around the side and rear parts of the cockpit (the V12 engine, under perspex, is there to be admired). The water radiator is front mounted, and the side inlets for brake and oil cooling are low down in the sills. Previous designs by Stevens have included the current Lotus Esprit (also noted for its side scallops), the new Lotus Elan, all the JaguarSport road car body kits, and the TWR version of the XJ-220 which will be revealed, in production form, next March. Currently Stevens is designing the McLaren 'supercar' due to appear in 1993.

Inevitably controversy has marred the introduction of the JaguarSport XJR-15. Stevens revealed its vital details to a magazine published on October 3, long before Walkinshaw was prepared to admit its existence, and even released his own design



The cockpit is as bare and functional as that of any racing car.

sketches, so he won't be welcome at JaguarSport for a while.

It was then supposed to be a TWR design, codenamed R9R, approved by Jaguar, but in the past month it has become the JaguarSport XJR-15 and launched at Silverstone with Jaguar's top executives, Bill Hayden and John Grant, on the platform. The new XJR 3½-litre racing car, still to be announced for 1991, is the XJR-14, not XJR-15 as planned.

The prototype, beautifully prepared in "Ecosse blue" (now registered as TWR blue however) and silver, looked a million dollars and sounded like a real Le Mans car as Walkinshaw started the V12 and drove up and down the pits straight. The cockpit is black, bare and functional, as a racing car should be, and is quite unlike the XJ-220

which will have a full specification. Fundamentally the XJ-220, of which 350 will be built in 1992-93, differs in having the 3½-litre, V6 twin-turbo racing engine behind the driver's shoulders, not the classic V12.

What can JaguarSport's customers expect for their £500,000 investment? Clearly an object of beauty, and of brutal performance. Recently I enjoyed three laps of Silverstone in the Le Mans winning XJR-12, with Martin Brundle at the wheel, and there was more than a hint of the sheer competence of the XJR's chassis.

It was pouring with rain, which made the outstanding abilities of the car more obvious. Brundle was enjoying himself, braking later and cornering harder than I would have dared even on a dry road, and despite a deluge of water coming through the door shuts, and from the floor wells, this was the experience of a decade.

The V12 engine, mounted directly onto the composite material chassis immediately behind the seats, was not as quiet or as vibration-free as I'd expected (the Porsche 962's flat-six twin-turbo engine is rather more refined), but it has wonderful powers of acceleration which aren't delayed by a turbo's throttle lag.

Brundle was really affected by the experience, not sure if he'd drive the XJR-12 again. "It's like an old friend," he said when he climbed out. "I think I'll cry all the way home." The XJR-9 gave Brundle his World Sportscar Championship in 1988, and he led all five 24 hour races he took part in, winning two of them. "The XJR's a favourite car for me. I never liked Le Mans, but having won it once I'd love the chance to go back and win it again."

Chances are that if the Automobile Club de l'Ouest can't raise enough entries for the 24 Hours of Le Mans next June, there will be 30 proud owners of the XJR-15 waiting for the phone to ring!

MLC



The omnipresent Tom Walkinshaw drove the wonderful sounding XJR-15 up and down the pit straight.