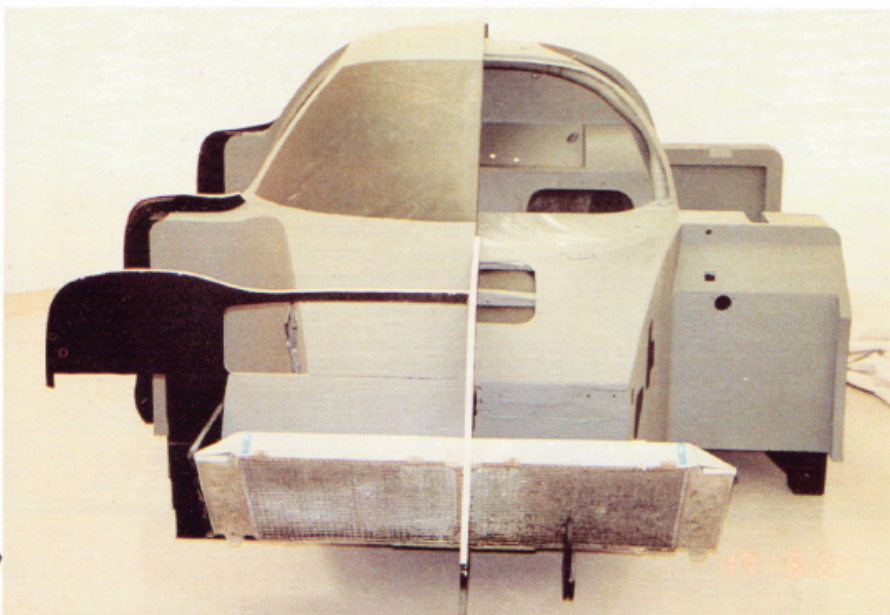
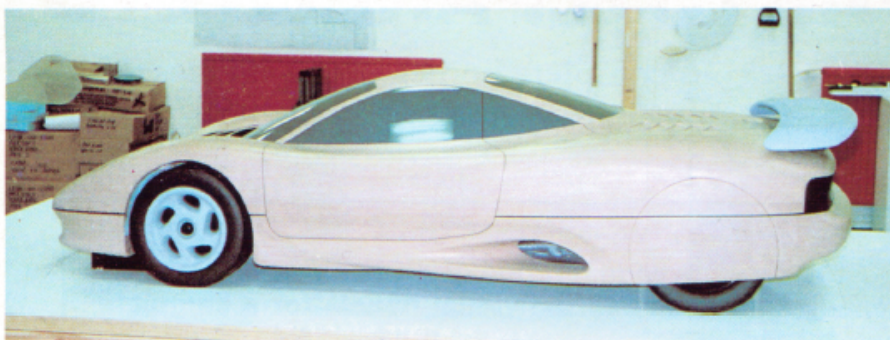
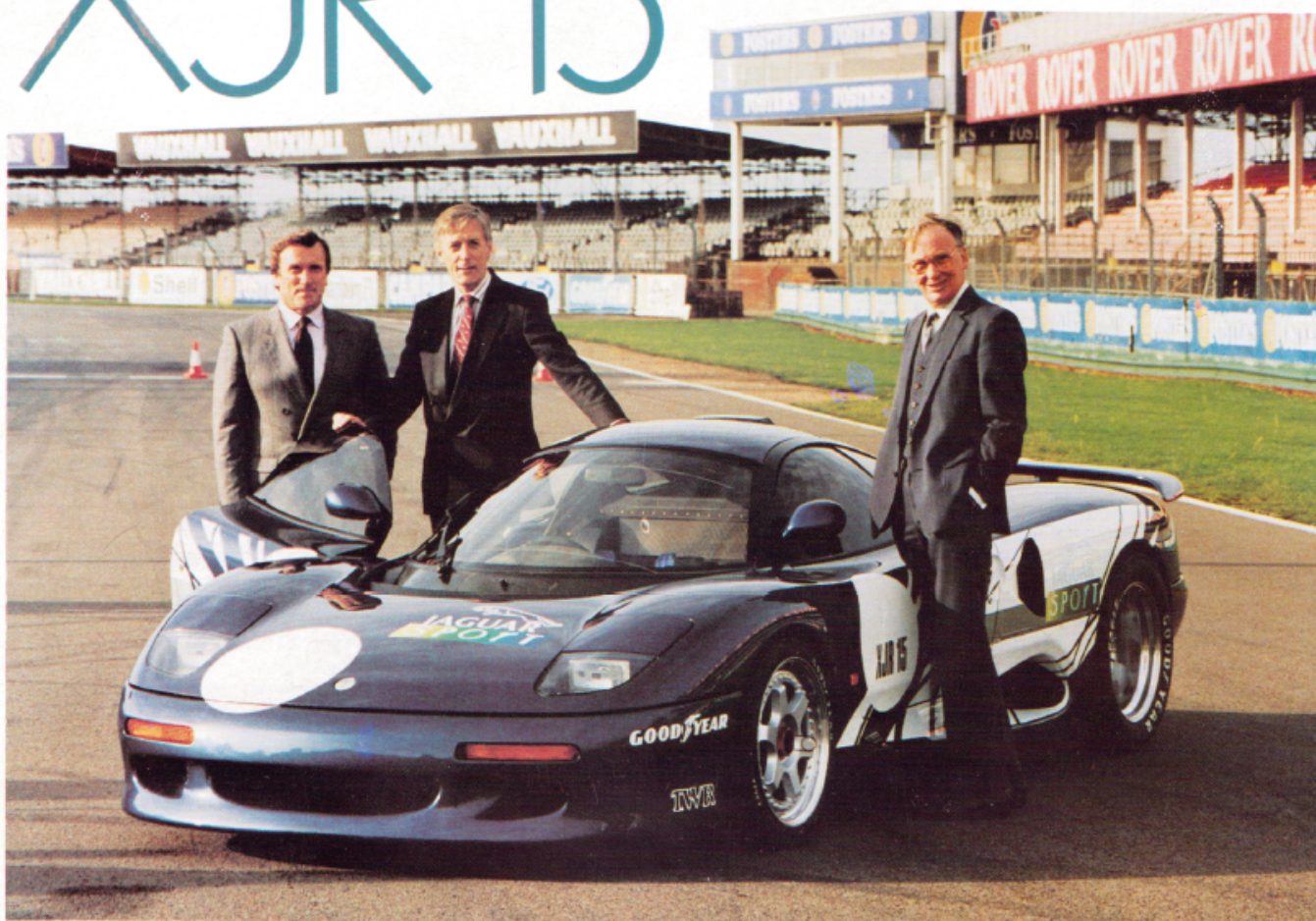


XJR-15

by Michael Cotton



It sounds like the biggest gamble in motor racing history! Last November JaguarSport invited 30 wealthy customers to pledge £500,000 each to secure an XJR-15 and the majority of these will be raced three times in the next few weeks. If your car, probably in the hands of a professional driver, wins Grand Prix supporting races at Monaco (May 12) or Silverstone (July 14) you win an XJR-S worth £46,000 but, if it wins at Spa on August 25, you'll net a cool \$1 million, say £526,000 at \$1.9 to the pound.

"Winner takes all." That was Tom Walkinshaw's challenge, though it doesn't take any Einstein to work out that the JaguarSport company will be the real winner. The £500,000 purchase price for the 6-litre, V12-powered thoroughbred includes

preparation for the races and transportation to the venues, but all damage will be billed to the owner, as will the driver's fees.

TWR will nominate eight drivers of international repute, two each from Europe, Japan, Australia and America, and the remaining customers will be expected to employ top names... Derek Warwick had his name down for an XJR-15 on the day of the announcement, so did Vern Schuppan, so they are likely to be the standard-bearers and pace-setters for the whole series.

The canny Walkinshaw has built the \$1 million prize into the budget but hopes to secure a major sponsor to underwrite the sum. Early in January JaguarSport hadn't secured such a sponsor but had built the first five cars. The build starts in JaguarSport's area in the TWR complex at Kidlington but the cars are finished at the new Bloxham factory near Banbury, alongside the XJ220 line.

Walkinshaw has pledged to build no more than 50 XJR-15s, 30 this year and possibly 20 more if the series can be repeated in 1992, so owners who regard their cars as an investment (and who wouldn't?) may feel protected. Adrian Hamilton, for instance, has ordered half-a-dozen for various customers and Jaguar director John Grant predicted that most would finish up in private collections or museums.

Some, though, will be reserved for road use, and it wouldn't take much work. Road-legal exhaust systems, lights and indicators are installed but it would be totally uneconomic to put the car through the routine Type Approval tests so it would be up to customers to register them in the specialist car category. "We can't control what people do with these cars after they've been sold," was the way Walkinshaw put it.

The XJR-15 was conceived in August 1988, a couple of months after TWR-Jaguar's Le Mans win, but distinctly as a road car - and we talked to one starry-eyed customer at the Racing Car Show who had no

Facing page:

High-power launch: Jaguar chairman Bill Hayden (right) and deputy chairman John Grant were at Silverstone with Tom Walkinshaw for the XJR-15's first showing.

Formative stages: early scale model, interestingly showing covered wheels like the XJR9 Le Mans car. Photo courtesy Peter Stevens.

Seating buck clearly shows wider cockpit and higher roof of XJR15 (left) compared



The finished full-size clay, painted Dynoc representing window areas. Photo: P. Stevens.

intention of allowing his £500,000 car anywhere near the track. He said he had placed the order long before the race series was mentioned and that his car would be delivered in April equipped with a five-speed, synchromesh gearbox. This, we believe, will come from Ferguson Developments in Coventry.

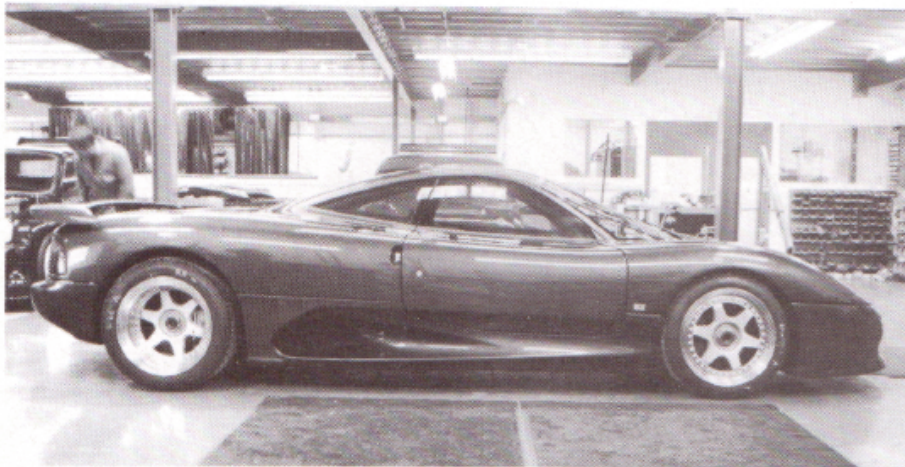
"If customers don't turn up for the races, there is nothing we can do about it," was the diplomatic response of Richard West, TWR's

marketing and communications director, who put the series together. It was he who negotiated first with Bernie Ecclestone, then with the organisers of the three Grands Prix, but West's biggest disappointment was failure to reach terms with the Automobile Club de l'Quest to have an XJR-15 supporting race at Le Mans. The ACO's figure was FF3 million, way beyond JaguarSport's budget.

It was a measure of the importance

The first prototype in 'carbon' prior to painting; bonnet badge says TWR... Photo courtesy Peter Stevens.





The first prototype – painted but graphics yet to be applied. Photo courtesy Peter Stevens.

of the announcement that Jaguar chairman Bill Hayden took the podium only three weeks after undergoing open heart surgery, alongside deputy chairman John Grant and JaguarSport's managing director Tom Walkinshaw. The 30 customers were largely drawn from those who were disappointed when the XJ220 list was over-subscribed, beyond 350, and might consider themselves to be the lucky ones!

The XJR-15 will be regarded in years to come as an active slice of motor racing history. It's very closely related to the XJR-9 and XJR-12 models that won the 24-hour races of Daytona and Le Mans in 1988 and 1990, changed only as was necessary to suit them for production. The cars are eligible for the Group C and IMSA racing categories, and it wouldn't be too surprising if some enterprising owner chanced an entry for Le Mans as well.

The V12 has been pegged at 450bhp, well short of the racer's 700bhp but still very adequate, one

supposes, for the purpose in mind. The road-equipped car scales 1,050kg and is expected to reach 150mph from rest in around 13.5 seconds. The top speed, if relevant, is 185mph.

The styling is the creation of a master. Peter Stevens, long a consultant to JaguarSport but better known, nowadays, for the current Lotus Elan style, produced an evocative shape that is purposeful from every angle, but beautiful.

The XJR-9 and 12 are unusually angular, especially in the side elevation, and wouldn't win any beauty contests, but Stevens has buffed the corners and rounded the edges to produce a complete transformation in the XJR-15. Especially neat are the oval air cooler intakes ahead of the rear wheels for the oil cooler and brakes, reminiscent of the arrangement on the Lotus Esprit Turbo, another of Stevens' accomplishments. The aluminium water radiator is located at the front, steeply angled, and has more generous cooling than in the

racing car.

Peter Stevens was associated with the project directly after it was inspired by the 1988 Le Mans win. "Tom had been wanting to do a road car for a long time," he says, "but the success provided the impetus.

"The first drawings were done in the autumn. It was going to be very close to the XJR-9 (we were calling it the R9R), with enclosed rear wheels. We realised, though, that it was going to be pretty difficult to get in and out.

"Then in October Jaguar showed the XJ220 at the Motor Show. We hadn't really realised that it was coming. It cleared our minds a bit and persuaded us that ours needn't be too much of a road car.

"Taking the race car as a base, we widened the cockpit by 75mm on each side (a total of 150mm wider) and raised the roof by 40mm to allow more headroom. We made the door aperture bigger by moving the base of the A-pillar forward by 100mm, but the bulkheads are unchanged and weren't moved.

"The scale model was ready by Easter 1989, and from there we went to a clay which was started in August and finished at the end of October. It was unusual in that we primed and painted the clay, and made epoxy tools from that. ASTEC, a TWR company, were responsible for the chassis, and a company called Futura did the bodywork.

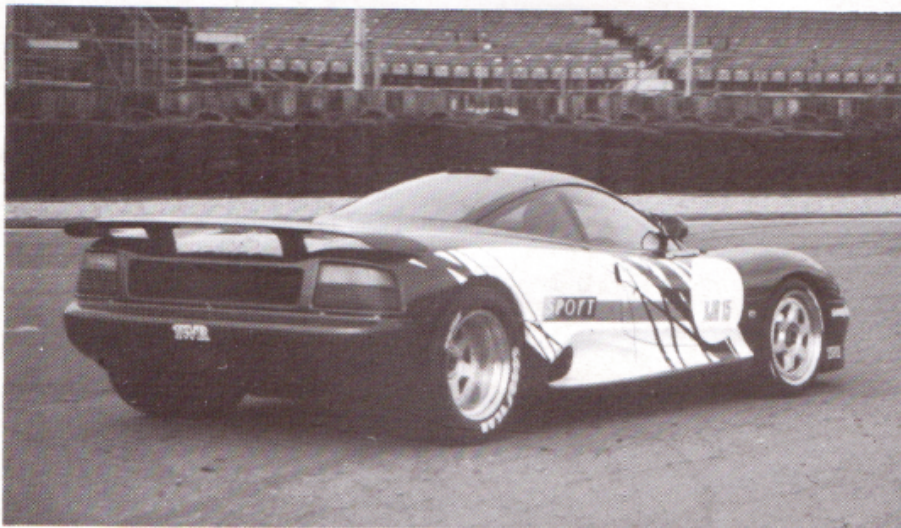
"We had the tools at the end of 1989 and it went quite quickly from there. The first prototype was held up a little by the Le Mans preparations but it was ready for Tom to drive when he came back from France, and the final development work took place between July and October 1990."

Something that is new mechanically is the six-speed TWR gearbox, designed for last year's Le Mans car but, eventually, rejected as an unnecessary development (the chicanes which break up the long Mulsanne Straight favoured the March-based transmission).

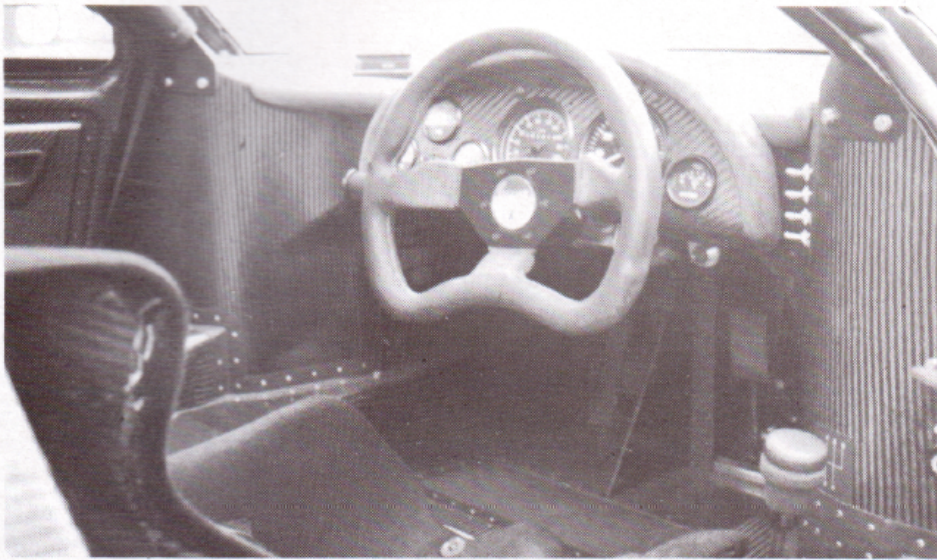
Drive goes through a triple-plate AP clutch with carbon plates, as in the racing cars, but the clutch control is hydraulic rather than mechanical to lighten the pedal. The massive brake discs and AP four-piston calipers are also from the racing car; wheels, from OZ, are 17in in diameter.

Andy Morrison, formerly the manager of Walkinshaw's Jaguar XJ-S Group A team, was put in charge of the XJR-15's development and has carried out most of the test driving, some of it at Millbrook at speeds in excess of 150mph.

With the muted exhaust something of the V12's race track bellow is lost,



Distinctive new shape by Peter Stevens contrasts with the angular and functional racer from which XJR-15 stems. Under the new body lies a chassis made of composite materials, based on the Southgate-designed XJR-9 carbon monocoque.

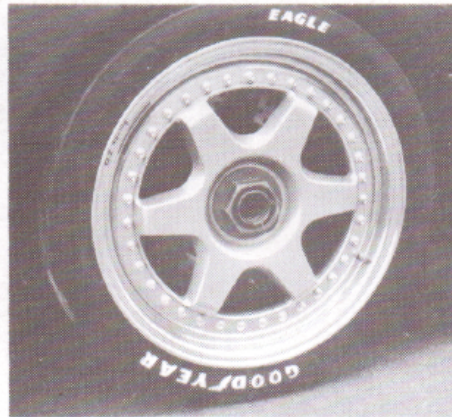


Interior is somberly functional and thus in sharp contrast to the road-car luxury of XJ220.

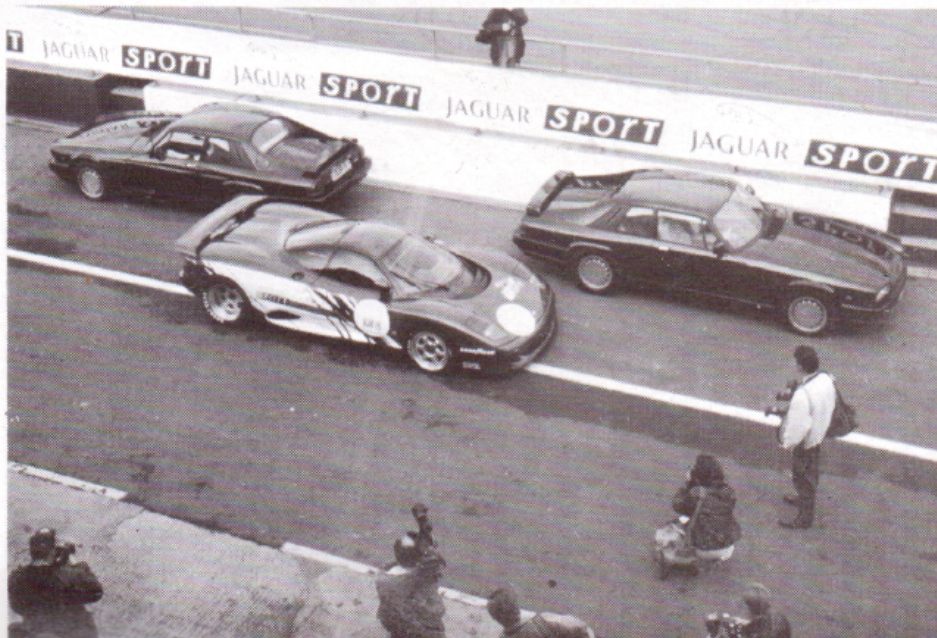
but the higher pitched wail will be appreciated by all the Grand Prix race fans fortunate enough to see the International Challenge events. It may even be that the Jaguar races will be better than the Grands Prix, and it can only be imagined, at the moment, how much damage may be incurred at Monaco.

Each race is planned to last 45 to 50 minutes – about as long as the 100-litre tank of fuel will last – and the first two races will be regarded by the promoters as a 'warm-up' for the third, where everything will be at stake. As well as an XJR-S, or the \$1 million prize at Spa, the owners of the winning cars will each receive a solid silver trophy fashioned after the XJR-15, and the driver will be given a replica.

Pre-release photographs which were leaked to *Autocar & Motor* clearly



The 17in wheels disguise XJR-9 type suspension; pushrods actuate spring/damper units at the front while dampers and springs along with brake discs are housed completely within the wheels at rear to allow maximum possible venturi-tunnel width.



Spoils of victory: XJR-S 6.0-litre coupes will go to the winners at Monaco and Silverstone. The \$1m is reserved for the victor at the climactic Spa round

show that the car was tested with a TWR badge on the nose, and there was a good deal of covering up the cracks before the XJR-15 was presented for the press launch at Silverstone in JaguarSport guise.

Now that we know that Walkinshaw intended the XJR-15 to be a TWR road car, and that Jaguar's new board jibbed at the prospect of it outshining the XJ220, you will understand that the politics got a bit heavy in the weeks before the announcement; historians will have to work hard to uncover the truth.

As they must, because it can only be described as fortunate that Sir John Egan accepted Walkinshaw's proposal to have the XJ220 powered by the lower pedigree 3.5-litre, V6 twin-turbo, when the V12 was intended for the XJR-15.

Never mind history, though! The fact is that in 1991 JaguarSport will sell two of the fastest, finest, and most expensive cars in the entire history of Jaguar, models which will knock the Ferrari F40 off its pedestal as the world's top supercar.

Postscript – the build

Seven XJR-15s had been built as we closed for press in early February, reports our correspondent Roger Woodley, meticulously assembled by a small team of about 20 men at Kidlington under the auspices of Jaguar's 'Special Vehicle Operation' created last September. The operation is distinctly reminiscent of XK-SS production, that car also being based on the then-current racer. The standard of build is extremely high while modern fixings contribute to an absence of messy nuts and bolts inside, where the finish is mainly pure carbon composite. Some 80% of all components are made in-house.

Outer panels are pre-coloured so that only the roof is painted. The engine cover, incidentally, carries the door hinges (doors are not 'gull-wing' like the race car's) and its fit is thus quite critical. As for the engine, the bottom end of the V12 is to Le Mans/IMSA spec. while the cylinder heads conform to Group A XJ-S practice. Anticipated performance is 0–60 in 2 seconds, while it was reckoned that 187mph was being obtained on Hanger Straight during testing. Due to shallower diffusers, downforce is thought to be about half that of the XJR-12 so XJR-15 might well have the better shape.

The first 20 cars completed will be purely racing machines but the following 30 may be produced more to individual customer demands, and will probably feature more efficient silencing and a five-speed gearbox.