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Jaguar's Advanced Lightweight Coupé Concept respects glorious past, moves brand forward

Motoring should be a joy, not a chore

In the immortal words of Jaguar founder and engineer Sir William Lyons,

"Motoring should be a joy and not a chore."

Say what you will about Jaguar's current, well-publicized troubles, but few brands are so draped in engineering, innovation, and style. Our [last Jaguar visit](#) elicited the greatest volume and vigor of responses of any article ever featured on these pages.

In that piece, dated August 1st, 2003, we questioned how much longer Jaguar could keep borrowing from the past, while we simultaneously noted that the company had done best when it had adhered to the principles of Sir Lyons' cars. The answer, we concluded, was a reversal in strategy: *memo to Jaguar... build what you know how to build. Luxury cars.*

In turn, at NAIAS, Chairman and CEO of Jaguar Cars Joe Greenwell engagingly described the new Advanced Lightweight Coupé Concept as "the sort of Jaguar we want to build."

It gives us little satisfaction that, more than a year after our piece, Jaguar appears to have concluded the same. It gave us still less pleasure to criticize the X-Type, and the recent closure of Jaguar's historic Browns Lane plant was positively traumatic.

Jaguar, you see, tugs at our hearts.

"Mine stopped," recalls our editor, describing having watched Design Director Ian Callum drive



The immutable, sensuous lines of a Jaguar coupé (circa 1948)...



... updated for the Millennium, sans extraneous surfacing and yet with the delicacy and poised, feline form befitting a Jaguar. The balance between control and flow increases with intricacy as the eye looks closer



the new Advanced Lightweight Coupé Concept upon the NAIAS stage in Detroit three weeks ago. Strobes flashed as reporters and their cameras craned for a look at the car - and the design theme - that would take Jaguar forward. The car tried valiantly to flash back - but could only manage one working headlight.



Undeniably from the same family, yet clearly different: XK-E and Advanced Lightweight Coupé Concept.

In the best Jaguar tradition, the perfidious failure of a trivial bulb matters not; Jaguar is one of a select few manufacturers whose cars are sensational enough for owners to forgive them their foibles. This Advanced Lightweight Coupé Concept easily won our hearts and minds for *best-of-NAIAS*, in that Ian Callum's first design for this storied brand superbly respects an illustrious heritage, while propelling Jaguar forward.

The XK-E's power bulge referenced the vertical, free-standing-fendered pre-'60s Jaguars; in the new concept, the bulge is visible, yet tamed. "Nothing is superfluous," says Callum



Jaguar is anxious to demonstrate the latter, going to the lengths of a cumbersome name incorporating both *Advanced* (i.e. forward-looking), and *Lightweight*, a reference to the all-aluminum construction of both this concept and the upcoming XK Coupé it previews.

Callum means it, too. The traditionally longer front overhang of Jaguars is put to work here, housing large scoops

Indeed, this *is* the 2007 XK8. Some of the details may change, but the proportions are expected to remain. Among the few pieces we hope to see amended are those 21-inch wheels, which - like the 20-inchers on the current XKR - are too large to offer a *Jaguar*-like ride.



"Mechanical purity," says Senior Design Manager Giles Taylor of the Advanced Lightweight Coupé Concept's face, citing the E-Type as inspiration - for, of all things, its *geometry*.

Indeed, recent large Jaguars have delivered a low-speed pliancy that is somewhat harder than that for which the marque is known. Those wheels, however, look great on the showroom floor and on a spec sheet - and therein lies one of the key reasons for the confusion and uncertainty surrounding Jaguar.

Taylor describes the E-Type's grille as a "focal point... perfectly symmetrical in both a horizontal and vertical plane." Here, the grille is an extruded piece from which, as Taylor puts it, "every line can stream backwards."

Jaguar's appeal is rooted in timelessness; in transcending the fickleness of fashion and the

The effect is as purposeful as it is deceptively simple. Far more thought has been put into this car than a first glance might suggest, yet it is pleasing both in form and detailing.

indignity of experimentation. While this does not excuse the evergreen XK its nine-year-run on the market, the notion of enduring aura and impact *does* illustrate the tribulation which the company presents to those who would lead it, and the challenge that covering Jaguar poses to an oft-impatient media.

A Jaguar is above the increasingly prevalent and peripheral pastime of *mag-racing*, preferring to encourage its driver to become intimately familiar with its abilities. Dynamically, this has led to criticism. The current XKR, for instance, lacks a limited-slip differential. Yet Jaguar's *CATS* (*Computer Active Technology Suspension*) is one of the few active suspensions we *do* like, intelligently and seamlessly increasing weight transfer at the rear for more neutral handling around town, and at the front for understeer as speeds climb. Moreover, where Jaguar has always been successful is in the progressive nature of its cars' power delivery, brakes (as befits a brand which featured all-around disc brakes in 1957), and handling. The cars react as smoothly as their lines intertwine, producing a pleasingly homogeneous effect; like few others, a true Jaguar feels as though it was designed not by committee, but by a single person.

For decades, of course, that person was Sir William Lyons - remarkable in that he not only ran the company, but largely designed the cars as well. This is one of several times we have noted the success of the all-encompassing individual in the automotive industry, from Lew Veraldi's revolutionary Taurus at Ford in 1986 ([see article](#)), through Ichiro Suzuki and the Lexus LS400 of 1990 ([see article](#)), and to Bob Lutz at GM today, to name a few.

Having started in 1922 with his Swallow Sidecar

Note the mix of circular and angular edges in the headlamps, mirroring those of the rear lights; thought engenders sophistication, which breeds homogeneity - a rare quality in today's vehicles, which often appear designed-by-committee in their incongruity



To Design Director Ian Callum, Jaguar is as much about power as it is about beauty.

The rear fascia, in particular, demonstrates controlled tension, as the lines continue from the roof to end in an outward bulge while the trunk lid itself contrasts them in a deliberate turn inward.

The rears of Jaguars have generally been disappointing, given the drama of their front ends.

Here, everything is more deliberate than we have seen from Jaguar previously, yet delicacy is retained. It has not been an easy task



Look closely at the above shot... see it? Jaguar's cockpits will exhibit more modern style, with aluminum inserts; a cleaner layout, and greater definition in form



Company that re-packaged Austin Seven components, Sir Lyons would use other Austin chassis, later moving on to incorporate Morris, Standard, Swift, Wolseley, and even Fiat 509 pieces. Renamed *SS Cars* to reflect the growing trend toward independent engineering, his company became *Jaguar Cars Ltd.* at the end of World War II, largely due to the negative postwar connotations of *SS*.



Time will tell whether the interior from the 2003 RD-6 Concept will find its way into a lower-priced Jaguar but, for the upper echelon, a more traditionally warm look will continue

From 1922 through his official retirement on March 3rd, 1972 (and beyond, as a consultant), Sir Lyons would personally approve and direct every step, presiding over the design and engineering of some of the most pioneering, exquisitely crafted, and memorable automobiles in history.



The SS cars and their long hoods and flowing fenders had wowed the press and public with style and speed. Through the war, William Heynes and Walter Hassan would develop the double-overhead camshaft engine that would define Jaguar for decades, debuting it on the 1948 XK120, a car of exceptional torsional rigidity. Jaguar's automatic 1951 Mark VII introduced luxury; its sportier side would evolve in 1954, when the XK140 featured rack-and-pinion steering and a Panhard rod at its rear end.

Ergonomically, this is perhaps the best high-end Jaguar ever. "There is an honesty about the car's interior which I really like," says Callum.

Jaguar is not averse to technology, being responsible for a slew of innovation, and having introduced *Bluetooth*, for instance, at about the same time as has BMW.

Yet what Jaguar wants is a less confronting approach, one that seamlessly integrates with its cabin materials. On paper, they appear to be on their way to striking that balance

The duality between sport and luxury would continue. By 1956, Jaguar was turning out dashboards with walnut veneer, even as it continued to sweep Le Mans, winning the race five times over in the '50s. In 1959, the famous 3.4 sedan (after which the current S-Type is largely fashioned) combined the company's luxury and performance sides into one exceptional car, setting a template that continues to be followed today.



The 1961 E-Type was the first production car ever to feature double-wishbone rear suspension in an



innovative, space-saving arrangement, raising roadholding and ride comfort to new levels while being considered then - as now - among the most beautiful cars ever produced. Its V12 was hailed as one of the world's great engines, and would continue service in the XJ sedan, and XJC and XJS coupés (the latter of which Daves Yarborough and Heinz would take to victory in the 1979 Cannonball Run!) Despite controversy over the XJS' *flying buttresses*, it became Jaguar's best-selling sports car ever. Today those same buttresses have enjoyed something of a renaissance on BMW's 6 series coupé. The XJ sedans have regularly been praised for over three decades, often voted the best in their class.



Care has been taken over the details. The result is still *Jaguar* in spirit, even as the materials and shapes are more modern.

The much-criticized *J-Gate* shifter is retained only in essence, with more mainstream back-and-forth tip control at the corner instead of the usual, vertically-placed gears

Today, twenty years after Sir Lyons' death, the Advanced Lightweight Coupé Concept is indescribably important to Jaguar. It "is not just a show car," Jaguar admits of its newest progeny, adding:



"it is a company personified.

"Like the iconic Jaguar XK120s and E-Types that preceded it, the Jaguar Advanced Lightweight Coupe heralds a new generation of stunning sports coupes and saloons; cars that will remain true to Jaguar's illustrious past but more importantly will see the company leaping confidently forward into the future."



Jaguar has been raked over the coals, of late, for excessive adherence to its heritage; for the Browns Lane closure, and for pulling out of Formula One. Despite the efforts of both Sir Jackie Stewart and of the amiable and capable driver Mark Webber, Jaguar F1 was a tale of heartbreak.

Back when the Malcolm Sayer-designed XK-E first appeared on our shores at the 1961 New York Auto Show, America - unaccustomed to its fastback style - fell in love.

Today, the fastback gives the Advanced Lightweight Coupé Concept unexpected practicality.

Yet Jaguar's silver, green, and red colors will race on, in the U.S. Trans-Am Championship, seeking a

They will not go too far, though; where BMW bothers with functional rear seats in its 6 series,

fifth manufacturer's title after winning the 2004 season under *Rocketsports Racing's* owner and 650bhp-modified-XK driver Paul Gentilozzi. 1,050 2006 Victory Edition models will round out the current-generation XK's production run, in celebration. expect Jaguar not to follow suit.

The \$36,995 X-Type 3.0 Sportwagon may have a better load capacity than the A4, 3 series, and C-Class estates - but few look to Jaguar for practicality of this sort.

As with Jaguar's continued efforts in racing, the Advanced Lightweight Coupé Concept requires one to *look*, and look deeper, before a valid critique can be formed. With the glitz of NAIAS and the shiny new models, that the media would do this was not as foregone a conclusion as one might have expected.

Rather, feline form leads function, and Callum will ultimately retain that truth, even as he and his team in Coventry revisit the ratio



The new Jaguar was arrestingly elegant enough that it drew the eye - yet the nuanced refinement of Jaguar's design language was too easy to miss, and some isolated, early comments appear to have done exactly that.



Why is this vehicle's execution appropriate?

- Firstly, as we noted almost two years ago in the aforementioned article, Jaguar's high-end models need softer changes than do its other vehicles.

More traditional, yet superbly capable: the XJ, our *Car of the Bear, 2003*, and putting up a good fight in the ongoing debate over our '04 awards.

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XJ was the first Jaguar with all-aluminum construction, down to the monocoque. Expect the 2007 XK to follow suit

The basic belt line and proportions of a Jaguar coupé are so well-defined (due to continuity since 1948) that they are largely immutable. This is as it should be. Criticism should be leveled not at the respect for these proportions in a like-minded successor (as has largely been done here) but, rather, at the practice of transporting fascias, surfacing, and detailing across disparate price levels.



The above rendition may look more *changed* at first glance, peripherally (in the fascia), but we are glad it did not turn out this way.

Different segments demand differing approaches.

On April 30th, 2003, Autocar carried this rendition of the next-generation XK Coupé (then thought to be a 2005 model).

A key reason for this tenet is the smaller *budget* of lower-priced vehicles. Surfacing in the X-Type was budget-restricted to an XJ-like hood, limiting visually the otherwise simplistic little sedan to being a caricature of the vastly more expensive XJ. Neither car has benefited from the association.

Some in the media, briefly scanning change of any kind, might have reacted more positively - but the car is decidedly too brash for a top-of-the-line Jaguar. Advanced Lightweight Coupé Concept's impact will be more lasting

picture: Autocar

Another point in support of Jaguar's respectful approach to the luxury market is that market's continued preference for nuanced design, at least in the Western hemisphere.



Moreover, Jaguar's pioneering heritage in the high-end segment is paralleled for length only by Mercedes-Benz (among its competitors), and with more canny management it could be turned from an albatross to an inimitable asset.

After nearly a decade, the current-generation XK will soon reach the end of the road - evergreen in its design, but with challenged packaging and ergonomics

Certainly, Jaguar's has such a rich library to reference, to varying degrees of literalness (as required by the intended segment). "We are not trying to copy our rivals because we have our own path to take," emphasizes Managing Director Bibiana Boerio. "We know what that path is and we are showing the way."



- Secondly, Callum and his team in Coventry have set a direction that is, appropriately for a car to wear the XK badge, both deferential and fresh.

Despite pulling out of F1, Jaguar continues its racing efforts under *Rocketsports Racing's* owner and 650bhp-modified-XK driver Paul Gentil-ozzi.

In 2005, Jaguar will seek its fifth manufacturer's title

Jaguar's coupe lines have been updated for the Millennium, sans extraneous surfacing and yet with the delicacy and poised, feline form befitting a Jaguar. The balance between control and flow increases with intricacy as the eye looks closer.

The XK-E's hood bulge referenced the *vertical*, free-standing-fendered pre-'60s Jaguars; in the new concept, the bulge is visible, yet tamed. "Nothing is superfluous," says Callum. He means it, too. The traditionally longer front overhang of Jaguars is put to work here, housing large scoops. The rear fascia, in particular, demonstrates controlled tension, as the lines continue from the roof to end in an outward bulge while the trunk lid itself contrasts them in a deliberate turn inward.

The rears of Jaguars have generally been disappointing, given the drama of their front ends; here, everything is more deliberate than we have seen from Jaguar previously, yet delicacy is retained. It has not been an easy task, and the result is deceptively simple and commendably uncluttered.

For the first time since a double-wishbone suspension was squeezed under the E-Type's trunk, the company is serious about efficiently packaging its larger cars. Jaguar has retained the length of the current XK, but pushes the wheelbase by almost 3 inches, the better to accommodate Americans who, as Callum put it to Autoweek recently, "don't fit our cars."

Certainly, where Jaguar has most suffered has been its interiors. At the lower-end, materials have been less than inspiring, even as ergonomics are generally contemporary. The higher-end cars have always been luxuriously appointed, with increasingly modern materials such as aluminum, carbon fiber, and alcantara. Before *piano black* became the talk of Detroit last month, the current XJ featured it around its center console and J-gate surround. Yet the packaging of these larger Jaguars has regularly been from another era. The driver is left cramped, searching in vain for the right button in an ergonomic nightmare.

The poor ergonomics, certainly, constitute one aspect of a large Jaguar's charm that today's product planners should not confuse with distinctiveness. For the vehicle's dynamics to inspire the driver to become more intimate with the car is one thing; that the cabin also forces upon us its positioning and scattered controls is quite another.

So consider us pleased that the Advanced Lightweight Coupe's cockpit is clearly laid out, with materials that stride the line between the current XK's olde-worlde aura, and the 2003 R-D6 Concept's *uncompromisingly-modern*.

"We all agreed that our interiors should be clean, simple, and straightforward," notes Callum.

"There is an honesty about the car's interior which I really like."

Indeed, Jaguar's formerly rocker-switch-laden ergonomics have never been as contemporary as displayed in its new concept.

Moreover, care has been taken over the details. The result is still Jaguar in spirit, even as the materials and shapes are more modern.

Jaguar is not averse to technology, either, being responsible for a slew of innovation (as noted), and having introduced *Bluetooth* (for instance) at about the

same time as has BMW. Yet what Jaguar wants is a less confronting approach, one that seamlessly integrates with its cabin materials. Not for Jaguar the array of buttons of *COMAND*, nor separate *iDrive* or *MMI* controllers; rather, a large touch-screen is nestled between the swashes of aluminum. On paper, they appear to be on their way to striking the balance they seek.

The much-criticized *J-Gate* shifter is retained only in essence, with more mainstream back-and-forth tip control at the corner instead of the usual, vertically-placed gears

We know a few additional details about the next XK. The 4.2-liter *AJ-V8* engine was, at its launch in 1996 (as a 4.0-liter), the fourth all-new Jaguar engine ever produced. Expect it to propel the next XK8 and supercharged XKR to 60mph in under five seconds.

The current *R* range of Jaguars is fast, too, continuing Sir Lyons' tradition of, through Jaguar history, backing-up Jaguar's sedans with sportier models. Still, the supercharger has given the cars more exuberance than ultimate poise (XJR apart). With an aluminum monocoque, the second in Jaguar's line-up, the 2007 XK8 will dramatically lower the 3,700lb weight of the current car. Jaguar, incidentally, first used aluminum bodies in 1948, with the XK120, before switching to steel as demand grew well beyond expectations. Today, the new long-wheelbase XJ Super V8 is an astounding 800 lbs. lighter than BMW's 760Li.

A Lotus employee once told CAR magazine that he worked for the best company in the world. His reasoning? Everyone wished him and his company well, wherever he went. The *Lotus* name had overwhelmingly positive connotations the world over.

Jaguar, still very much a British institution despite over 15 years of Ford ownership, engenders similarly positive feelings. Tell someone that Jaguar puts up money to sponsor the preservation of jaguars in the wild, and they grin. Explain that the acronym for Jaguar's *Computer Active Technology Suspension* is *CATS*, and the grin grows wider. Feed an E-Type or XJ at the pump, and fellow drivers marvel at your taste, rather than condemn your prosperity.

Yet there is, as we wrote nineteen months ago, a constant state of debate surrounding Jaguar.

Consumers worry about reliability, even as Jaguar raised its warranties from 3 years/ 36,000 miles to 4 years/ 50,000 miles over a decade ago, and even though the company's J.D. Power results continue to improve dramatically.

Enthusiasts concern themselves with strategy. Few want Jaguar to change, yet most cannot see how the company can continue to exist under the status quo.

The trouble had been building for years. Jaguar's reliability sank in the 1980s, with management still adhering to a bygone style of product testing: workers who inspected and fixed the cars at the end of the line. The system was no match for Lexus' correction at the source, before a problem was allowed to proceed down the line. On November 2nd, 1989, Ford paid \$2.5 billion for Jaguar, and moved in to rectify the situation. Jaguar would go on to produce its first V8 (in 1996) yet, a year later, the inline-6 configuration which had been part of Jaguar's soul for decades disappeared. As under British Leyland in 1979, when managing director Bob Knight presided over the narrowing of the upcoming XJ40 sedan's engine bay to make the mandated expedient use of Rover's V8 impossible, Jaguar has again been embroiled in a fight against corporate homogenization. The media swarmed over Jaguar's two new Ford-sourced platforms, and simultaneously spread and reacted to gruesome rumors that the company was planning an SUV, even as Jaguar moved toward unique, innovative all-aluminum construction and no behemoth truck appeared. Sadly, in 1999, Jaguar's personable Head Designer Geoff Lawson – responsible for both the timeless XK8 and past and present XJs, together with the questionably overt S-Type – suffered a fatal heart attack.

The first sign of revitalization was the appointment of Ian Callum, of Aston Martin DB7 fame, to take Lawson's place. In the public eye, Callum has attempted redefinition of the Jaguar design language, starting with the 2003 RD-6 Concept, the first Jaguar to recognize that the company needed different strategies for different segments.

Bravely, Callum was on hand at the North American International Auto Show in Detroit to present the Advanced Lightweight Coupé Concept, his second effort, tentatively concluding, "we hope you like it."

Well done, chaps.

Bold, yet deferential, the Coventry team's work connects the dots between the peripheral luxury of Jaguar's past, and the functional luxury of its modern rivals. It acknowledges current trends without copying them; communicates Jaguar's future without curbing it, and is effortlessly fresh while still familiar. Jaguar's '07 XK8 will be another Callum winner and, we expect, a Jaguar that retains the unique intimacy of the marque's best cars - dynamic in nature, certainly, yet an intimacy that does not end when the driver gets out, instead evoking lingering glances and long hours spent reverently polishing.

