

XK8 - 5 Times Winner of American Trans-AM Series

North American Trans-AM Series

The Trans-AM Series was created in 1966 by Sports Car Club of America (SCCA) and has evolved over time from its original format as a Manufacturers' Championship series for modified passenger sedans and coupés to its current form as a Drivers'/Manufacturers' Championship Series that is open to GT style race cars.

Previous Jaguar Trans-AM Wins

The Group 44 Jaguar XJS driven by Bob Tullius won the Drivers' Championship in 1977 (TA1).

In 1978 he dominated the series winning 7 of the 10 races including the Watkins Glen 6 Hours, to win both the Category 1 Drivers championship and Manufacturers championship for Jaguar.

From 1979, British Leyland opted to run Triumph TR8's, but Bob Tullius returned in 1981 with his XJ-S finishing second overall and almost winning the series.

With Jaguar concentrating on the European Touring Car Championship, it was 19 more years before Jaguar returned to the Trans-AM Series.

Enter Rocketsports Racing

Rocketsports Racing was created by racing driver Paul Gentilozzi to compete in the Trans-AM series. Gentilozzi scored his first Series title in a Chevrolet

Corvette (1998), and captured the 1999 crown in a Ford Mustang.

The year 2000 saw the Trans Am Series usher in new manufacturer eligibility, multi-valve engines, fuel injection and spec rear wings. It marked the return of Jaguar, brought to the party by Gentilozzi's Rocketsports team.

Gentilozzi was aiming at winning his third consecutive championships and if successful, he would have become the first driver to win three titles in three different marques. It was an ambitious goal given that the Jaguar XK8 had no racing history or development.

2000

The team built three cars with Jeff Altenburg competing in the second Jaguar XK8, and the third built as a back-up car.

Although the team had done a lot of analysis and were making both structural and geometry changes, the chassis was an on-going development process and their biggest challenge was time. No testing was carried prior to the first race and the team had no time to develop the XK8 engine and used their parent company engine, namely a Ford V8 unit.

With its smooth lines and body contours, the XK8 had excellent aerodynamics, making it one of the fastest straight-

line speed cars in the series. However, ongoing development wasn't achieved until roughly halfway through the series. Irrespective, they still managed three outright wins in the 12-race series. The title was captured by Brian Simo in his Qvale Mangusta who also won three wins but took the title on the strength of seven top-five finishes. Gentilozzi finishing a credible second overall.

2001

In 2001, Gentilozzi won his third Trans Am Series championship in four years and led Jaguar to its first manufacturers' title since 1978. Rocketsports won five of the eleven races that year with Gentilozzi winning four of them to finish ahead of Brian Simo in his Qvale Mangusta.

2002

Although Gentilozzi won the first race of the season, Boris Said powered his Panoz Esperante to eight wins in 2002 to earn his first Trans-AM Series championship, as Jaguar used the season to develop a multi-valve engine program that would prove to be nearly unbeatable.

DOHC AJV8 Engine

"The last time a Jaguar engine competed in Trans-AM was back in 1981. Its return is long overdue," said Rocketsports Racing team owner, Paul Gentilozzi. "It's only right that we work to develop a Jaguar engine for our racing XK8."



With its smooth lines and body contours, the XK8 had excellent aerodynamics, making it one of the fastest straight-line speed cars in the series. Scott Pruett (2003) on his way to winning his third Trans-AM title. That year Jaguar won 10 out of the 11 races and completely dominated the competitive field of 53 cars. Jaguar won the Manufacturers Championship ahead of Chevrolet and Ford.



Jaguars victorious Trans-AM racing team of Rocketsports Racing who won the prestigious series in 2001 (Paul Gentilozzi), 2003 (Scott Pruett), 2004 (Paul Gentilozzi), 2005 (German Klaus Graf) and 2006 (Paul Gentilozzi) giving Jaguar a total of four manufacturers' Trans-AM titles.

Development of the race version of the 4.0 litre engine used a production AJ-V8 alloy cylinder block and heads with a new heavy-duty crankshaft fitted with lightweight racing pistons and connecting rods. Modifications also included custom-made headers and a race fuel injection system. The engine was enlarged and fortified to 4.5 litres and revved to over 9000 rpm. The engines were able to develop more than double the horsepower from the standard 294 bhp (SAE) to over 650 bhp.

2003

The Rocketsport Jaguars returned with a vengeance in 2003 with drivers Scott Pruett, Johnny Miller and Wally Castro collectively winning 10 of the 11 races to all but make a clean sweep of the season.

Scott Pruett won eight en route to his third Trans-AM title. Johnny Miller finished second overall to claim a Jaguar one-two.

The last race of the series went to Puerto Rico for the first time in history, with hometown hero Wally Castro finishing first, driving one of the Jaguar XJ8's. Jaguar won its third manufacturers' title.

2004

For 2004, Rocketsports entered XK8's for lead driver Tom Kendall, Getilozzi and Tommy Drissi.

The stage was set for a Rocketsports showdown featuring four-time champ Kendall and three-time titlist Gentilozzi. Both drivers entered the season in hot pursuit of Mark Donohue's record for most wins (29) with Kendall leading the charge with 26 wins, but followed closely by Gentilozzi at 24 wins.

The year belonged to Gentilozzi, who gained his fourth title on the strength of five wins in eight starts. His final victory of the season came in Denver to tie Donohue at 29 career wins.

Overall, Jaguar finished 1st, 2nd, 4th and 5th to win another manufacturers title.

2005

For 2005, Rocketsports entered XK8's for lead driver Klaus Graf, Getilozzi and Tommy Drissi.

Other teams also entered XK8's including motor racing champion Greg Pickett for Team Cytosport.

The 2005 season was one of the most competitive in years. A scant 19 points separated the top four drivers with just two races to go, as Corvette ace Randy Ruhlman led the points chase by a single point. German Klaus Graf, driving a Rocketsports Jaguar, finished out of the top 10 in three of the first four races but turned things around in a big way with the season headed for the home stretch.

He won the final three races to secure his first drivers' title.

Gentilozzi, ran a limited schedule in 2005, but remained a factor when he entered. He won in the streets of Toronto to become the all-time Trans-AM leader in career wins with 30.

The other feat of note was Greg Pickett winning in Edmonton in his XK8, to become the first driver to win in four different decades. Picket finished third overall with Jaguar XK8's claiming four of the top six places thrusting Jaguar to a third-straight and overall, fifth Manufacturers' Trans-AM title.

2006

Significant news was made off track, as a new promotor assumed series' ownership and management. Just two races were held in 2006. Gentilozzi earned his 31st career win and added a second in the final race propelling him to his fifth title. No manufacturers title was awarded in 2006.

There was no Trans-AM Series in 2007/8 and Rocketsport moved to IMSA's American Le Mans Series. This was significant in that it brought Jaguar back to IMSA racing with Gentilozzi using an XK-RS that saw a Jaguar returning to the Le-Mans 24 hour race in 2010. ■