

1938 Jaguar SS 100 3.5 Litre by Leonida (Romania)

Editor: Continuing on from Bob Kretschmer's letter on page 5, I researched the information he provided and included the following based on article in UK Drive Magazine. The SS100 was made available for a Test Drive and at that time was for sale by Prestige House UK for £750,000.

Test Drive date - 23 August 2018 by Sam Dawson with photography by Charlie Magee.

We drive the only Leonida-bodied Jaguar SS100... Royal Blue...and explore its amazing past involving Romanian royalty and more. This unique SS Jaguar 100 hides a tale of mystery, Royalty and turbulent 20th Century politics within its art-deco lines. We drive it, the only Jaguar to be bodied in Romania.

For the best part of half a century, the car you're looking at here enjoyed almost mythical status. The existence of the 'Romanian Jaguar' was confirmed only by documentation. It went unseen by British eyes until it finally emerged in a rusty, dismantled state at a Coys auction in 2000.

King Carol II of Romania was the first owner of the fifth 3½ litre 1937 SS Jaguar Saloon made.

A couple of months earlier his son Prince Michael had taken delivery of the very first 3½ litre SS100 (*Chassis no:39001*) made to mark his 17th birthday, as



was custom for the royals at the time. (Eventually this SS100 was smuggled into Greece and restored).

In May 1938 another car, a complete SS100 chassis with instruments, electrics, but with no body (*Chassis no:39070 and Engine no:M744E*) was purchased from Jaguar by King Carol's mother, the Queen Mother who had purchased it for her second son Prince Nicholas.

Prince Nicholas' flamboyant engineer and occasional racing driver Jean Calcianu, designed an aluminium body for the car and the coach-builder Leonida & Co, whose premises were very close to

the royal palace built the car and finished it in the same blue that she wears today.

The political climate was running against the monarchy and the Prince then gave the car to his Air Force flying instructor Captain Cula, who hid it, awaiting better times. Unfortunately Captain Cula died in an aviation accident and his wife inherited the estate.

Cula's wife was later romantically involved with her solicitor whom she owed money. He had therefore taken the car away along with its papers.

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An influential and wealthy Bucharest dealer who had heard of the car and it's important history from Calcianu, approached his wife to see if she would sell him the car and was told of her relationship and debt to her solicitor.

The dealer contacted Nicholas Mazilu, a motoring enthusiast to whom he owed a favour, and arranged to meet the solicitor along with Mazilu and a member of the Security Services, the Securitat.

The intent was to scare the solicitor into selling the car and parting with the papers, so as to recover his debt from the wife.

The car was identified by the Securitat man as having belonged to the Royal Family, an obvious problem for the solicitor, so a sale price was agreed.

Nicholas used the car and even proposed to his future wife in it, but she insisted that he sell the car as it was too beautiful and attracted too many ladies from Brasov University, where he worked as an engineer.

In January 1955 Nicholas sold the car to Dr Viorel Pop who lived in Hunedoara. Nicholas told him that he must be careful in driving the car due to it's speed.

This 1 off car is certainly not shaped to the usual SS100 style, from the front the wings are completely different to the standard model and at the rear the spare wheel is set into the bootlid, reminiscent of the prototype SS90 that Jaguar made in 1935.



The distinctive radiator grille with its wishbone-shaped headlamp supports makes it seem more familiar at first glance. But then you see the helmet-like wings enclosing the front wheels, the higher scuttle with its low, speedster-style windscreen and the sloping tail which semi-encloses a spare wheel. View it from the side or rear three-quarter and there's something distinctly French about it, and it's not just the blue paint.

I don't know how tall Prince Nicholas was, but he wouldn't have had much room inside this Jaguar. Getting in is an ordeal unless you're markedly shorter-legged than average. I had to crank my left knee over at an angle known only to yoga instructors to clear the vast steering

wheel, before sliding into the seat, opening the rear-hinged door wider, and dragging my right leg in at a similar angle.

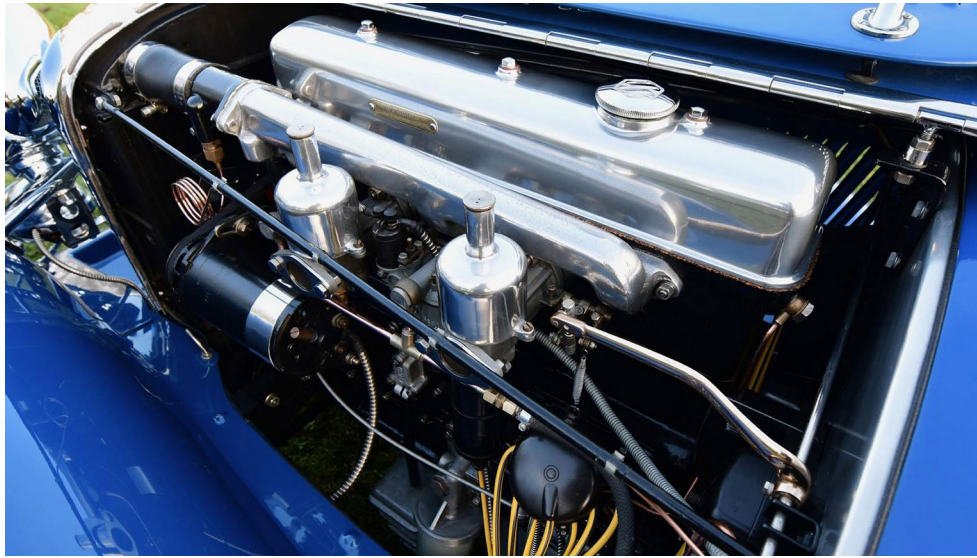
Space is at such a premium that my lower legs are completely folded round, and I have to operate the pedals with the outside edges of my feet. Amazingly, the higher scuttle of Calcianu's design was supposed to give the Leonida Jaguar more legroom than the standard SS100.

Press the starter button, tap the throttle, and the 3485cc straight-six bursts into life with a deep, percussive baritone.

It would have been even louder when it was new – Calcianu intended it to be a racer, possibly to succeed Prince



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Nicholas' Duesenberg, and it sported four deafening open exhaust pipes.

I twist my right foot painfully and acceleration is instant and vigorous. It's a product of the car's lightness – Leonida used aluminium rather than SS's standard pressed steel, so even given the more extensive metalwork of Calcianu's design, it's a fair bet it weighs a lot less than the normal 100 3.5-litre's surprisingly hefty 1,181kg.

With lighter-than-usual coachwork, Prince Nicholas' car would have had no trouble reaching the SS100's namesake top speed.

Political turmoil in Romania and a subsequent half-century in hiding had taken its toll on the unique SS100.

This is what is known at present of the early history of the car other than Philip

Scott offered the SS100 for sale in 2000 after purchasing it from a dealer in Hungary, the dealer's name was never released, probably to protect himself from any questions from the Hungarian and Romanian authorities, about how the car came into Hungary and in his possession.

The car was then sold at Coys auction and by this time was in need of restoration. The current owner purchased WLD 100 later in the year after initially being put off by the work ahead.

Since then a painstaking and meticulous restoration was undertaken with incredible attention to detail. The current owner made several visits to Romania to talk to people and track the car's history, he has even had correspondence with the now King Michael to make sure every detail was correct.

Every inch of this car has been fettled to the highest of quality and the result is truly amazing, with a smooth and powerful 3.5 litre to pull you along effortlessly. The paint and interior are both to the highest of standards, the restoration was completed in 2011 and only 1,400 miles have been covered since then.

However, there's a bizarre footnote to this story.

In his 1984 book *Jaguar SS90 & SS100 Super Profile*, the late Jaguar authority Andrew Whyte, having unearthed a picture of Michael I, Ernest Dawyl and the first 3.5-litre SS100, noted that the Royal family 'imported this car, plus a chassis (39070) subsequently reported in the USA with a MkV engine.'

When the car's remains were discovered, the chassis plate was missing. It was identified by its unique body, and the engine number M774E. Could it be that a Ceausescu apparatchik managed to rake in some American cash by selling of a genuine SS Jaguar 100 chassis plate, allowing a backyard restorer to authenticate a bitsa? As with so many aspects of this car, it's a tantalizing mystery. ■

