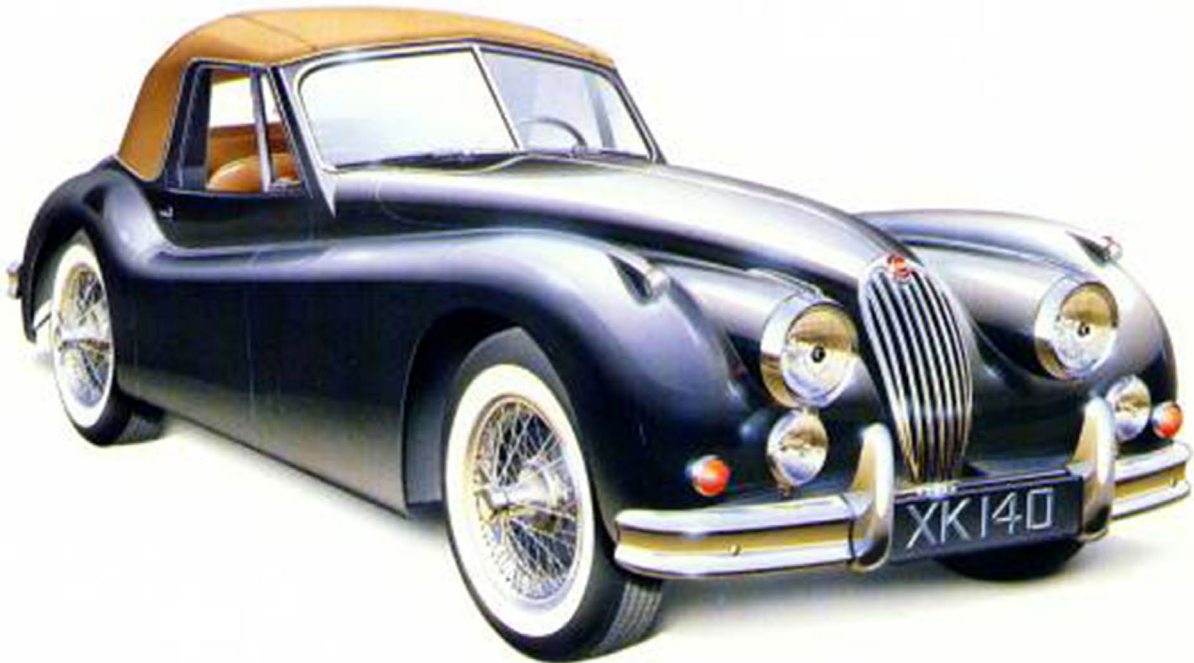


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1954 XK 140 DROPHEAD COUPÉ

The legendary XK sports car began with the XK 120 of 1948, and developed into the XK 140 of 1954. Combining an exceptional performance with the added advantages of two-plus-two accommodation and tougher bumpers, the XK 140 continued the popularity of the XK series especially in North America. The drophead coupé was the most expensive of the range (which also included roadster and fixedhead), and this example also sports the 'Special Equipment' pack which included wire wheels and extra lights. The XK 140 gave way to the XK 150 in 1957.

Celebrating 70 Years of the XK 140 (1954-2024)

The XK140 was manufactured between 1954 and 1957 as the successor to the XK120. The XK140 included more interior space, improved brakes, rack and pinion steering, increased suspension travel, and telescopic shock absorbers instead of the older lever arm design.

In 1956 the XK140 became the first Jaguar sports car to be offered with automatic transmission.

Design

Like the XK120, the XK140 was primarily designed by Sir William Lyons with the aid of Fred Gardner (Body Development Shop Manager) and William Heynes (Chief Engineer from 1935 to 1989).

The XK140 was introduced in late 1954 and sold as a 1955 model. Exterior changes that distinguished it from the XK120 included more substantial front and rear bumpers with overriders, and flashing turn signals above the front bumper.

The grille remained the same size but became a one-piece cast unit with fewer, and broader, vertical bars. The Jaguar badge was incorporated into the grille surround. A chrome trim strip ran along the centre of the bonnet and boot lid. An emblem on the boot lid contained the words "Winner Le Mans 1951-3".

Interior

The interior was made more comfortable for taller drivers by moving the engine,



Peter Goodale, 1956 Old English White XK140 (DHC) (80.7110) The car was fully restored 1999-2001 and fitted with front disc brakes, 4.2L engine and 5-speed gearbox. More recently fitted with period wire wheels & electric power steering.

firewall and dash forward to give 3 inches (76 mm) more legroom. The XK140 had a walnut veneer fascia and a generally more luxurious interior reflecting Mark VII themes.

Two 6-volt batteries, one in each front wing were fitted to the Fixed Head Coupe, but Dropheads and the Open Two Seater had a single 12-volt battery installed in the front wing on the passenger side.

The spare wheel was housed beneath the boot floor.

Engine

The XK140 was powered by the William Heynes designed 3.4 litre Jaguar XK double overhead camshaft inline-6 engine, with the Special Equipment modifications from the XK120, which raised the specified power by 10 bhp to 190 bhp (142 kW) gross at 5500 rpm, as standard.

The optional C-Type cylinder head carried over from the XK120 catalogue, and produced 210 bhp (157 kW) gross at 5750 rpm.

When fitted with the C-Type head, 2-inch sand-cast H8 carburetors, heavier torsion bars and twin exhaust pipes, the car was designated XK140 SE in the UK and XK140 MC in North America.

Wheels and Tyres

As with the XK120, wire wheels and dual exhausts were optional. Cars with the standard disc wheels had spats (fender skirts) over the rear wheel opening.

Factory spec 6.00 × 16 inch crossply tyres or optional 185VR16 Pirelli Cinturato CA67 radials could be fitted on either 16 × 5K½ solid wheels or 16 × 5K (special equipment) wire wheels.

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Rob Smith participating in a motorkhana in his XK140 FHC

Celebrating 70 Years of the XK 140 (1954-2024)



Paul & Judy Taylor, 1955 XK140 DHC. The car was purchased in the early 1970's by NSW Club member Peter Main who raced the car quite competitively. The car was fully restored in the late 90's and sold to Paul in 2002.

Body Styles

The Roadster (designated OTS – Open Two Seater – in America) had a light canvas top that folded out of sight behind the seats. The interior was trimmed in leather and leatherette, including the dash.

Like the XK120 Roadster, the XK140 version had removable canvas and plastic side curtains on light alloy barchetta-type doors, and a tonneau cover.

The door tops and scuttle panel were cut back by two inches (50mm) compared to the XK120, to allow a more modern positioning of the steering wheel. The angle of the front face of the doors (A-Post) was changed from 45 degrees to 90 degrees, to make access easier. The windscreen remained removable.

The Drophead Coupé (DHC) had a bulkier lined canvas top that lowered onto the body behind the seats, a fixed windscreen integral with the body, wind-up side windows, and a small rear seat. It also had a walnut-veneered dashboard and door cappings.

The Fixed Head Coupé (FHC) shared the DHC's interior trim and rear seat. Production cars had the roof lengthened, windscreen placed further forward, shorter front wings, and longer doors, all resulting in easier entry and more interior space and legroom.

Performance

A stock XK-140 SE could achieve a top speed of 120–125 mph (193–201 km/h). Road & Track's XK-140 MC test in June 1955 recorded a best two-way average of 120.3 mph (193.6 km/h). Best one-way run was 121.1 mph (194.9 km/h).

Sports Cars Illustrated's test of the same model in Aug 1957 had a fastest two-way average of 121 mph (195 km/h). Their best one-way run was 124 mph (200 km/h). Karl Ludvigsen's test published in Sports Car World (July 1957) had the same results as the SCI test.



Rod & Peggy Davis, XK140 roadster with a C-Type head. This car had a complete nut and bolt restoration which took nine-years to complete. It is only 1 of 73 RHD roadsters built.

Acceleration times from 0–60 mph (97 km/h) were 8.4 seconds, 9.1 seconds and 9.1 seconds respectively. Only the R&T test tried 0–100 mph (161 km/h) which took 26.5 seconds.

Standing 1/4 mile (~400 m) times were 16.6 seconds (82 mph (132 km/h) approx) and 16.9 seconds (86 mph (138 km/h)).

Production

According to the Jaguar Heritage Trust a total of 8,937 XK140's were built. However, the vast majority of XK140's built were LHD (7,545).

Of the 1,392 RHD cars produced: -

- ◇ 839 were Fixed Head Coupes
- ◇ 480 Drophead Head Coupes
- ◇ 73 Roadsters. This compares with 1,170 RHD XK120 roadsters manufactured.

Coachbuilt Versions

The Jaguar XK140 Zagato Coupé was built for Guido Modiano whose XK140 was damaged in an accident. Zagato displayed the car at the 1957 Paris Motor Show, hoping to sell more.

The XK140 Coupé by Ghia was designed by Giovanni Michelotti in 1955. Four cars were reportedly built. ■

Information for this article from various publications.

What It's Like to Drive a Vintage 1955 Jaguar XK140

Editor: The following is an edited review written by Road Test Editor Dan Ilika for UK AutoGuide.

I'm as nervous as I've been in recent memory as I release the heavy clutch and begin rolling down the road in the beautiful English countryside.

As an American, the fact that I'm not driving on the right side of the road — both literally and figuratively — is the only thing on my mind as I reach down to grab hold of the gear lever that somehow feels so normal in my left hand. I depress the clutch pedal and pull the shifter towards me, pause in neutral, and continue the rearward motion. The car shudders as I let the clutch out once more, my left foot not finessed enough for a clutch pedal that dates back to the same year "*Rebel Without a Cause*" hit the silver screen.

And that's just the first of the 1955 Jaguar XK140's many idiosyncrasies. The gearbox is finicky, the steering is awkward, and the slightest bump in the road can upset the car in an especially unnerving way. The brake pedal is shorter than a British-born jockey, the exhaust rattles like a can of spray paint below 2,000 rpm, and the cabin smells like a combination of clutch and highest gasoline from time to time.

Generation Gap

Few of these quirks would be classified as charming; part of the car's character, perhaps, but certainly not charming. In fact, at least by modern standards, there isn't a whole lot that's inherently good about the XK140. And yet it's also rewarding to drive in a way that automakers today can only dream of.

Expecting any less from this car — officially a 1955 Jaguar XK140 3.4 SE

Fixed Head Coupe — is as futile as its imperfections are forgivable. Beyond its strikingly beautiful and incredibly curvaceous body, this is a sports car that was built to be driven. So when Jaguar offered me an afternoon behind the wheel before the Goodwood Festival of Speed, I was quick to oblige.

I was also aware of the significance of the car I was driving. It's not everyday you come across a British sports car more than six decades old in this condition, let alone one finished in the classic British Racing Green. Add in optional goodies like the wire wheels and dual exhaust, and it's no wonder this XK is worth a lot of money. While not the most valuable Jaguar of all time - that distinction belongs to the XKSS - the XK140 is worth every penny. It's also not easily replaced.

Think of the XK140 as just one step closer in Jaguar's sports car evolution toward the transcendent E-Type. With a 3.4-liter straight-six nestled under its elongated hood, the optional C-Type cylinder head pushed output to a claimed 210 horsepower at the flywheel — plenty of power for the day. A four-speed manual gearbox manages power transfer, and a set of drum brakes at all four corners are at your disposal when it comes time to slowly bring the Brit to a halt.

Everything about the XK140 is heavy, from the clutch to the steering to the brakes, yet the gas pedal is surprisingly light. No, it won't surprise anyone with sheer speed, but it's certainly eager to climb through the rev range. Doing so is rewarded with a sultry sound that transcends time, all six cylinders standing rank and file, working in unison in a way no V configuration can match.



A few rough downshifts were all but unavoidable as I worked to get the hang of the non-synchromesh transmission, with the move from second to third a particular struggle as we got to know each other. But with a delicate touch, changing gears was a silky-smooth affair that brought with it a satisfaction that's hard to find in anything on the modern market.

My long limbs betrayed me as I attempted to manoeuvre around the cramped cockpit, the tiny pedal box and school bus-sized steering wheel giving me all kinds of grief. Yet the steering itself was surprisingly responsive, the car quick to move in the direction it was pointed.

The Verdict: 1955 XK140 Review

Having not driven many cars of this XK's vintage, it was both a treat and a challenge to pilot the old coupe through the countryside. There was a need to wrestle with the XK140 somewhat early on, with fast corners and white knuckles going hand in hand, but it became surprisingly familiar as the day wore on. My nerves were also quick to settle, making way for pure joy as I cruised the narrow roads that snake their way across England.

Driving a car like this old XK will quickly make you appreciate any of the umpteen advancements offered in modern sports cars. Better brakes, suspension, and responsiveness are just some of the reasons why, say, a Jaguar F-Type is so damn good.

But modern sports cars have also sterilized the driving experience compared to something like the character-filled Jaguar XK140, solving everything with equations rather than emotion. So maybe all those quirks are charming after all. ■

Editor: Information for this story sourced from AutoGuide.

