

# VALE BOB BERRY (1929-2021)

Bob Berry was a former Jaguar racing driver who went on to become Jaguar's Public Relations Manager in the 1960's and later held senior positions within Jaguar and then British Leyland.

Bob Berry passed away on New Year's Day. He was 91 years old and had been suffering from cancer for some time. He passed away peacefully at home.

## Berry talks his way into Jaguar.

While studying at Cambridge in 1951 he wrote to Lofty England (then Jaguar's Competitions Manager), saying he normally went to Le Mans, he spoke French as his mother was French and he would be happy to help out while there. Lofty responded that they had their own team of people but he was welcome to make himself known while they were all there.

Berry and his sister did turn up and he was given a job timekeeping and ended up becoming part of the team which achieved the first of Jaguar's seven successes at Le Mans when Peter Walker and Peter Whitehead gave the C-type its first victory. Whether or not it was the euphoria of the team's victory, but 'Lofty' offered Bob a permanent position in the Jaguar publicity department under Bill Rankin.

## Jaguar Racing Team

The 1950s was an exciting time to be involved in Jaguar's racing activities. During this period Bob was involved



*Bob Berry sitting in the cockpit of a D-type taken in 1996 at Sebring International Raceway*

with the Jaguar team not only at Le Mans, where Jaguar won again in 1953, '55, '56 and '57 but also the Mille Miglia and the seven days/seven nights record-breaking with a Jaguar XK120 Coupe at Montlhery.

## Berry Turns His Hand to Racing

In such a racing environment it is hardly surprising that Bob's thoughts turned to racing himself. His road car at the time was a MG TD which was disposed of and replaced by a Jaguar XK120.

After an encounter with a Silverstone bank, the XK120 required a major rebuild for which purpose Bob was

able to acquire one of three special lightweight aluminium alloy bodies for which Jaguar had no further use. With engine modifications fit for a D-type, the car was very quick and eminently capable of seeing off C-type Jaguars.

From his first race in March 1954 at Goodwood in which he finished third behind Michael Head's C-type and Tommy Sopwith's Sphinx-Armstrong Siddeley but in front of two other C-types, Bob went on to have a notable season among the C-types culminating in two wins at Silverstone. Across the Irish Sea, he finished second in the Wakefield Trophy run on a handicap basis at the Curragh circuit.

## Offer to Drive a D-type

Continuing with the XK120 at the beginning of 1955 Bob took a win and a second place at Silverstone and a second place at Oulton Park before being offered the chance to race a D-type for the Lancashire scrap machinery millionaire Jack Broadhead. As Bob later told the story, the discussion on the Jaguar stand at the 1954 Earls Court Motor Show which led to the drive went as follows:

*JB Sithee lad, I'm getting one of them new things - a D-type.*

*BB Really?*

*JB Aye, wouldst thee like to drive it?*

*BB Yes, but I've not much experience*

*JB No matter - tha'll learn. That's that - settled then!*



*Bob Berry behind the wheel of OKV2 at Goodwood in May 1956.*

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And so for the rest of 1955, throughout 1956 and for part of 1957, Bob raced Jack's D-type OKV 2 (registered XKC403), one of the original ex works cars.

Berry raced it on 18 occasions with varying degrees of success, claiming three 1st places, three 2nd and two 3rd places. Berry referred to the D-type as "Ecurie Broadhead".

Bob had no dispensation from Jaguar to take time off for racing, so long weekends in Europe were out of the question, but a holiday in Portugal coincided with the Circuito do Porto. On the way to the race, soon after crossing the English Channel, the team's decrepit borrowed transporter broke down terminally leaving Bob with no alternative but to load up the D-type with all the tools and spares which might come in useful and drive the remaining 980 miles to Portugal.

In 1956 at Goodwood racetrack, he won one race and was leading another when he left the track and was thrown out of the D-type, leaving him badly injured on the grass listening to the car continuing pilotless to destruction. As a result, he spent six weeks in hospital and the car had to be substantially rebuilt.

## Sir William's Ultimatum

The time off work had not gone down well with Jaguar supremo Sir William Lyons who delivered the ultimatum that either Bob worked for Jaguar with reduced racing activities or he left the company to pursue a career as a racing driver.

Bob chose the former option and in his last year with Jack Broadhead's D-type confined himself to less time-consuming club racing.

In his last outing with the car in October 1957 at Oulton Park, one of his favourite circuits, Bob contested three races and won the third from pole position.

After that he occasionally raced an experimental ex-works Jaguar Mk VII saloon in club events, but his days in international sports car racing were over.

## Launch of the Jaguar E-type

By 1961 Bob Berry was Public Relations Manager and together with Bill Rankin were in charge of PR for the launch of the E-type at Geneva.



*Bob Berry at Silverstone in 1956 with Lancashire scrap machinery millionaire Jack Broadhead. Berry referred to the D-type OKV 2 as "Ecurie Broadhead".*

As one of the few prototypes, 9600 HP had helped in the development of the E-type and was then designated a Press Car.

Because of its very busy life 9600 HP left Browns Lane for the trip to Geneva, later than originally planned. Rather than transporting it, Berry drove it all the way from Coventry to Geneva, catching the midnight ferry from Dover. Being delayed by fog between Calais and Reims he arrived with 20 minutes to spare after the drive of his life, "good God, Berry, I thought you weren't going to get here" Sir William said, as the car was quickly getting wiped clean for the big reveal.

Berry recalled, "it was the only car I actually drove flat out from one end to the other of a journey, simply to get

there on time. It was the most incredible journey and I've never forgotten it."

## Jaguar PR Director

Bill Rankin died in March 1966 and Berry succeeded Ernest Rankin as Jaguar's Director of Marketing and Public Relations, going on to become a main board director responsible for vehicle sales worldwide nine years later.

After his retirement he remained much in demand among Jaguar enthusiasts for talks about Jaguar specifically, and the value of motor racing to vehicle manufacturers generally. ■