

Australian Launch of the XJ-C & XJ-S



Photograph of the Australian launch of the XJ-S in June 1976. The venue was the Jaguar National Rally at Mildura organised by our club. Leyland Product Marketing Manager Tony Cumming, seen here pulling back the dust cover.

Editor. I still remember the launch of the XJ-C and XJ-S. Given it is now 45 years since the world launch, I thought it appropriate to put a few words together about our clubs historic weekend.

The Jaguar XJ-C was launched to the world in April 1975 followed by the XJ-S in September 1975.

Delays in production and delivery to Australia resulted in the Australian launch being deferred until 1976. The regular build of Australian built XJS's didn't begin at Browns Lane until as late as May 1976.

Mildura was the venue for the launch of the Jaguar XJ-C and the XJ-S on the Queen's Birthday weekend, 13th June 1976. This event was organised by the JDCSA as the National Concours.

For those that attended the weekend, it was a prestigious occasion. Both cars were given glamour billing and were tantalisingly parked together under covers for a large part of the main display day.

It was John Kay who finally performed the ceremony in front of virtually the entire group of Rally participants. The

cars on display were a Signal Red XJ-S with Black trim and the XJC was finished in Greensand with Moss Green trim.

I recall the time I saw the dust cover come off the XJ-S. There was lots of discussion. Not all kind.

The XJ-S was a beautiful looking car and radically styled, but a number of people felt it lacked great beauty compared with say the XK120 and the E-type. Many felt that Jaguar had thrown away all of its wonderful styling heritage.

However, there were a handful of us who took a more pragmatic approach.



The XJ-S and the XJ-C were kept under raps until after lunch when all of the attention was rightly focused on the new Jaguar models.

Australian Launch of the XJ-C & XJ-S (cont)

That evening over a number of drinks and a very late night we discussed the car and design at great length. We all concluded that in reality it didn't matter what design or shape Jaguar came up with, or how revolutionary the car was, in most people's eyes it was never going to be accepted as a replacement for the legendary E-type.

We believed though that this was precisely what the company needed as Jaguar was stagnating while its rivals such as Lotus (Esprit), Ferrari (308 GTB/GTS), Lamborghini (Countach) and Maserati (Quattroporte) were producing modern designs for the 21st century.

As it eventuated, the XJ-S improved with each passing year and from the moment the XJ-S HE arrived in 1981, there seemed to be renewed hope, and from then on, the car went from strength to strength to become the much admired grand tourer it always should have been, with the best year for XJ-S production occurring in 1989.

Back to Mildura. Both cars were looked over from head to toe, but the more radically styled XJ-S afforded the greater



The XJ-S and XJ-C were transported to Mildura under wraps. Officials from Leyland Australia seen here celebrating after the launch of the XJ-S.

interest at the time. However, without exception, everyone at the launch loved the XJ-C styling and agreed it was a beautiful looking car.

Unfortunately, the XJ-C was short-lived. A downside of the XJ Coupe was its premium pricing. Customers effectively paid more for less car, and in those pragmatic times, it effectively sealed its

fate. Production ended the following year in November 1977, after a mere 10,426 had been built.

Footnote: Although the XJC was hidden from view, a few of us got up to some mischief the night before and the launch very nearly never happened. However, I will let others tell that story.

Graham Franklin



The wraps come off and the 4.2 XJ-C is revealed to the public. The person on the right with his back to the camera is JDCA former President Phil Smart who was the driving force in the organising committee and responsible for getting Leyland Australia's participation in the Rally.