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THE JAGUAR XK180

A CONCEPT ROADSTER FOR THE NEW MILLENNIUM

Jaguar today unveils a new vision of the classic roadster. Fifty years after the Coventry-based company launched the XK engine and the XK120 sports car, the XK180 concept car has been created to showcase the skills and talents of Jaguar stylists, craftsmen and engineers.

Inspired by the great Jaguar roadsters of the fifties and sixties, the Jaguar XK180 was hand-built in the company's Special Vehicle Operations (SVO) workshops at Browns Lane in Coventry. Although not intended for production, the concept car is based on a shortened version of the supercharged XKR convertible, which was introduced earlier this year. The all-new bodywork, hand-made in aluminium, follows a styling theme that combines influences from past Jaguars with completely modern styling. The AJ-V8 power unit is modified to produce 450 horsepower and the brakes, wheels and suspension are upgraded to match the engine's performance.

The Jaguar XK180 is the first major project from the newly re-established Special Vehicle Operations Department. Originally formed after the Daimler Limousine ceased production in the early nineties, the department is staffed with craftsmen skilled in every aspect of vehicle manufacture and expert in producing bespoke vehicles for individual customers.

"The XK180 graphically illustrates the skills we have available in SVO," said Nick Scheele, Jaguar's Chairman and Chief Executive. "In the future we will be using these skills to produce components and systems for those customers around the world who want to enhance aspects of their vehicle's performance. Whilst the great

majority of our customers are completely satisfied with the specification and performance of their cars, a number of customers have asked for a more individual approach. SVO will, in future be able to satisfy this demand from our customers."

The concept car features a system of fingertip gear-selection by controls mounted on the steering-wheel, developed by Jaguar specially for this project. The detailed attention paid to the car's mechanical specification underscores Jaguar's philosophy that concept cars should not be just static showpieces but fully engineered vehicles. Many of the engineering features incorporated into XK180 have been road and track tested on a fully instrumented engineering prototype.

Some thirteen and a half inches (345mm) shorter overall than the XKR, the XK180 was styled in the Jaguar Styling Department under the eye of the company's director of styling Geoff Lawson. The lines of the car are the work of Keith Helfet, a senior designer at Jaguar and best known for his work on the XJ 220. Helfet's brief was to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the introduction of the XK series and he drew influences from a range of XK-powered machines, notably the D-Type. The result combines echoes of past racing Jaguars, in the shape of its rounded nose and the headrests behind the seats, and such unique forms as the 'double-bubble' windscreen.

Whilst the XK180 may be reminiscent of the D-Type in shape, this heritage is combined with modern technologies. The sculptured rear end styling incorporates a unique rear light cluster specially developed by Valeo for XK180. Twenty four light emitting diodes (LEDs) provide the light source for the rear lamps, direction indicators and stop-lights.

Jaguar sports cars have always offered luxurious driver and passenger accommodation in addition to outstanding performance but in the Fifties and Sixties the range always included a 'Roadster' model which put performance before luxury.

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"By combining style with an enhanced engineering specification we were creating a car which was the spiritual successor to the classic Jaguar roadsters," said Geoff Lawson.

The roadster spirit is evident in the cockpit of the XK180. It uses high-performance components – in the shape of racing seats with full safety-harnesses –and then adds a touch of Jaguar luxury by trimming the seats in the finest Connolly leather. There is tradition too, with a dashboard in engine-turned aluminium carrying switches that echo the style of the great Jaguar Le Mans winners of the Fifties.

The aluminium body panels were all formed by hand and assembled at Abbey Panels of Coventry. Abbey Panels Ltd. is an old-established Coventry company with long associations with Jaguar. Among many other projects, Abbey Panels have collaborated with Jaguar on the construction of the Le Mans-winning C and D-Types, the legendary XJ13 prototype and the XJ220.

From Abbey Panels the aluminium body was shipped across Coventry to Jaguar's Special Vehicles Operations Department (SVO) at Browns Lane. Here, Mike Massey, Manager, SVO, Gary Albrighton, Principal Engineer and XK180 Project Manager and their team shortened the wheelbase of the XKR platform by five inches (125mm) to accept the new body style.

Development of the XK180's engine was carried out at Jaguar's Engineering Centre at Whitley, Coventry. The engine was modified by increasing the supercharger speed by 10 percent and this, together with modifications to the intercooler, induction and exhaust systems, raised the maximum power of the 4.0-litre unit from 370 bhp in standard form to 450 bhp.

The standard five-speed automatic transmission of the XKR and the 'J-Gate' have been modified to incorporate a sequential gear selector system controlled by push buttons on the steering-wheel. This enables the driver to change gears without taking a hand from the wheel and the selected gear is indicated by a fascia mounted gauge.

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The XK180 suspension is based on that of the XKR, with racing-style aluminium shock absorbers incorporated in the coil spring/damper units. The suspension was developed within SVO with assistance from ride and handling experts at the Whitley Engineering Centre. The Brembo braking system, with aluminium four pot callipers, features 355 mm x 32 mm cross drilled ventilated front discs and 315mm x 28mm cross drilled ventilated rear discs. The unique-styled, two-piece aluminium wheels are the largest ever fitted to a Jaguar. The wheel rims are twenty inches in diameter, and are nine inches wide at the front and ten inches wide at the rear. They are fitted with super-low-profile Pirelli tyres - 255/35 ZR20 Pzero Direzionale at the front and 285/30 ZR20 Pzero Asimmetrico at the rear.

As he left for Paris and the unveiling of XK180, Nick Scheele, Jaguar's Chairman and Chief Executive, pointed out that the work of creating the new concept car had come at a time when the company's engineers had a particularly heavy workload. "Jaguar is currently committed to the most intensive new product programme the company has ever undertaken," he said. "In October, we will launch the S-Type, an entirely new sports saloon that will double our production and sales. In 2001, another new Jaguar saloon - the X400 - will make its debut.

"These two major programmes, together with ongoing work aimed at continually improving our existing models, mean the company's engineering resources are working at full stretch. But Jaguar would not be Jaguar if the men and women who develop the cars of tomorrow could not find the time and enthusiasm to create an exciting special project to celebrate this landmark anniversary in our history. They did it fifty years ago when they designed and built the XK 120 record-breakers. They did it with the XK-SS road-going version of the D-Type and with the lightweight E-Type. The XK180 is proof that this creative spirit is still an essential part of Jaguar."

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FOR FURTHER INFORMATION: Communications and Public Affairs

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