



Kiwi fruit

New Zealand's most famous products are probably oven-ready sheep, opera singers and exotic fruits, but over the last few years it's gained a bit of a reputation for producing some of the finest Mark 2 Jaguars as well.

This is all due to the efforts of a local doctor, Greg Beacham, who saw the potential of combining New Zealand's cheap labour rates with a stock of largely rust-free Jaguars to create cars which were as new in all respects, and could sell at a new car price.

You can still buy 'new' Mark 2 Jaguars – if you have a spare £50,000 to spend. Mark Dixon tested the as-new Beacham Jaguars, built in New Zealand and exported all over the world

Photos by **Mark Dixon**

Beacham started selling his rebuilt Jaguars in the late eighties, when the classic car boom had pushed the cost of good original Mark 2s to a level where the extra premium demanded for his 'new' cars did not seem outrageous. The cost of a

Beacham Jaguar today is £45,000 plus VAT – £52,875 if you are paying the full whack yourself.

Except that the customers which the Beacham company is looking for (Dr Beacham has left the business, to go back into medicine) most likely won't be footing the bill themselves. British-market cars are being targeted at senior company management, probably of director status, who fancy driving a company car which is out of the ordinary and makes more of a statement about themselves.

You can't expect your average company



director to do without his central locking or CD system, however – so the Beacham Jags have been subtly modified to incorporate just these features. In addition, each is fitted with power steering (whisper it gently, but it's a Honda unit), air conditioning, an alternator rather than a dynamo, Jaguar XJ-S rack and pinion steering and electronic ignition. The awkward Moss gearbox of the original has been ditched in favour of a modern Getrag five-speeder, as fitted to the XJ40, and there's a Borg Warner automatic option.

Simon Wheeler is the UK agent for Beacham, and aims to sell five cars a year here from the 25 produced annually. Operating from tiny premises in rural Berkshire, Simon is a true classic car enthusiast who has done a fair bit of

Above, interior is possibly the car's best feature. Wood and leather look very inviting

Right, all cars come with wire wheels. Paintwork is carried out to modern standards

Below left, Moto-Lita wheel is a period option and gives the interior a sporting touch



historic racing and rallying in his time – he recently co-drove Rauno Aaltonen into sixth place on the Charrington's RAC. So far this year he's sold four out of five of his Beacham allocation, which is not bad going for these recessionary times.

Both 3.4- and 3.8-litre engines are offered with the Beacham car, although Simon finds that most customers prefer the bigger option. 'The 3.4 is a very sweet engine, but the 3.8 does have slightly more torque.'

Simon is at pains to emphasise the quality of the Beacham cars. 'The Japanese took over the company in April 1991, and they've brought in Japanese standards of quality control. The complete drivetrain, for example, of each car is put into a 'hack' and



thoroughly road tested before it's installed in a rebuild car, so that any problems or leaks can be detected.'

So what happens to a Mark 2 when it receives the Beacham treatment?

'Each car is completely gutted so that the shell can be shot-blasted back to bare metal. It's then mounted on a swivelling frame so that any repairs can be made – although there is usually not much rot on a New Zealand car. Lead is used for any major repair work.'

Naturally, all mechanical components are overhauled or replaced as necessary, and the interiors are completely retrimmed. In the past Beacham used to buy in their trim kits, but now they do it all 'in house'.



'The Japanese took over in 1991 and have brought in Japanese standards of quality control'



Painting is done with a Glasurit system to modern car standards, which includes underbody treatment. The shells are also injected with wax afterwards.

Surprisingly, perhaps, for such a limited-production car, there are no optional extras or one-off paint finishes offered beyond the standard five colours. But there's a good reason for that, as Simon explains:

'Beacham operate on a production line system. By keeping to a standard specification, they can control their costs, and any cancelled orders are easier to place with another customer. If someone orders a car in bright pink, for example, and then the deal falls through, it's not going to be very easy to sell that car again.'

Such a business-like approach partly explains why Beacham is still operating while other rivals in the same game have gone bust – most notably Vicarage Cars, whose immaculately presented adverts ('Why spend over £25,000 on a Mark 2 Jaguar?') were such a feature of glossy magazines in the eighties.

'I think Vicarage simply overreached themselves,' says Simon. 'I've been told that at one time they had about 70 staff and yet they weren't producing more than 29 cars a year. Beacham, on the other hand, have a total of 27 staff and they build 25 cars a year. Fifteen of those go to Japan, five to Switzerland, and five to the UK.'

Above, demonstrator has a handling kit to reduce body roll. Left, classic lines would cut a dash in the office car park



Above, the Beacham Jaguar is still a fast car today, helped by a modern Getrag gearbox. Left, cars can be ordered with 3.4- or 3.8-litre engines

At the time of going to press, Simon was waiting to take delivery of his fifth car, but offered to let us try his demonstrator instead. This car was rebuilt in 1988 and lacks some of the modern fripperies such as central locking or air conditioning. More significantly, it's fitted with an original Moss gearbox rather than the Getrag 'box now used in Beacham Jags.

Our plan was to borrow the car for a couple of days and put it through its paces to see how it stood up to hard use. After all at over £50,000 the Beacham Jaguar is up against some very stiff opposition, and if it couldn't perform adequately as daily transport then its price would be impossible to justify.

We also wanted to loan the car to a third party, the sort of person who might just be a Beacham customer. How would someone who was used to a modern luxury car cope with what is still essentially a sixties machine?

First impressions were of a beautifully finished car which belied its four years on the road. British Racing Green is apparently the most popular colour, but this car was painted a very dark blue, which contrasted well with the extensive chroming and wire wheels.

Inside, the Jaguar is quite stunning. Seats retrimmed in red leather, red wool carpet and woodwork polished to a mirror-like gloss create an impression of opulence.



Company car?

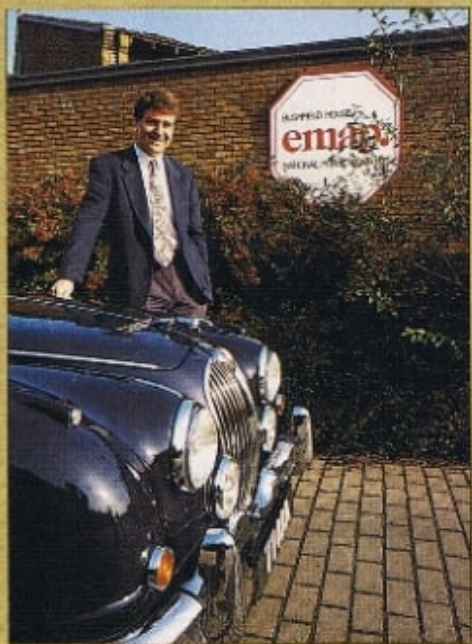
Malcolm Gough is managing director of Emap Nationals, the company which publishes *Popular Classics* and several other motoring titles, including *Car* and *Performance Car*. He currently runs a Saab 9000i Turbo as a company car, but also has a Triumph Stag which he has owned for 16 years. Would he consider the Beacham Jaguar as company transport?

'I loved driving it, and it's a great way of getting noticed. But you'd have to be a committed enthusiast to consider it. I enjoy driving, which is why I chose the Saab, but there are times when you have a long journey to do and you just want to get there with the least amount of trouble and stress. The Jaguar demands a bit too much concentration all the time.

'We're a publishing company with a lot of involvement in motoring titles, and as such the Jaguar makes the right kind of statement. I had to collect some people from the station earlier, and the Jag would have gone down brilliantly in that kind of situation. But with an old car there will always be a questionmark over its reliability, and I'd never cope with the 3000-mile service intervals.

'Furthermore, there's no alarm fitted which I think is absolute lunacy with a car this expensive. You could push the quarterlights open with your fingertips and operate the ignition with a bent paperclip. I took the family out for a meal in a restaurant last night and was always worrying about leaving it in the carpark.

'I'd like one a lot - as a second car. I wouldn't contemplate it as my daily transport, though, and it is very, very expensive.'



which is quite different from the antiseptic black plastic driving environment offered by so many modern cars. There's a period drilled-spoke Moto Lita wheel adding a sporty touch to this luxury setting.

The Moss gearbox used in older Jags was never very user-friendly at the best of times, and it needs sympathetic handling. First gear has no synchromesh, and the lever must be 'felt' into position rather than shoved straight through. Upward changes have to be made with a distinct 'one, two' movement, and downward changes with a generous blip of the throttle to help the cog-swapping.

To an enthusiast, this is all part and parcel of owning a classic car, but it does demand a certain amount of thought. The Mark 2 is not a car you can climb into and drive on auto-pilot, like most executive barges.

The slowness of the gearchange - particularly between first and second gears, which seems to take an age - has a significant effect on acceleration times. It would be very interesting to see what difference the Getrag gearbox makes; we suspect the car would be much quicker.

Beacham don't make any big changes to the 3.8-litre Jaguar engine, and it is still an impressive performer, smooth and strong. A legal limit motorway cruise is achieved at an easy 2700rpm, while the car will sit rock steady at speeds of up to 100mph without



'The Mark 2 is not a car you can climb into and drive on auto-pilot'

stress. It's rarely necessary to move out of overdrive when overtaking, since depressing the throttle simply wafts the car forward on a wave of torque, leaving high-g geared modern hatchbacks floundering in its wake.

Surprisingly, after two days of hard

driving in all sorts of conditions, including high-speed motorway blasts and city centre traffic jams, the Jaguar returned an excellent overall fuel consumption of 22mpg. You wouldn't get much better from a modern car of this capacity and performance.

Only the dated aerodynamics mark the Jaguar down as a long-distance cruiser. On a windy day there's a lot of rustle and buffeting around the door frames, although it's only really noticeable at speeds above 70mph. The ride is smooth and the seats comfortable, if a bit lacking in support for the back.

One feature which none of the drivers who tried the car liked very much was the power-assisted steering. It may be fine for parking and bumbling around town, but it's too light at higher speeds and gives too little feedback, demanding a delicate, clinical approach which is at odds with the car's raw performance.

Brakes, on the other hand, work well. There's a slight loss of efficiency when hauling up hard at a dual carriageway roundabout but they never feel that they are about to let you down.

Handling and grip is remarkably good for a car of this age, although it's not difficult to get the back end out of line when exiting a corner. This car has been experimentally fitted with a Harvey Bailey handling kit, which includes stiffer front springs and an anti-roll bar, and there's significantly less body roll than with a standard car. The

The possession of a Mark 2 Jaguar produced by Beacham Cars Limited represents ownership without equal.

Skilfully and sympathetically restored in New Zealand to the highest quality control standards, each is available with subtle updates including rack and pinion power

steering; central locking; electronic ignition and air conditioning.

Just 5 cars are destined for the UK with a delivery period of approximately 6 months. Alternatively, I have one ex UK customer car for immediate sale.

BEACHAM



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'It would make a stunning and comfortable town carriage'

handling package may be made available on new Beacham cars before long.

The Beacham Jaguar is a beautiful and characterful car. It is fast and it handles well. It is even acceptably economical. But £50,000 for what is still, after all, a Mark 2 Jaguar?

If I were the director of a successful company, covering a limited mileage, and most of that in town, I'd certainly consider the Beacham. An opalescent grey example with automatic transmission would make a stunning and comfortable town carriage with an immense amount of style.



However, this is 1992 and you could currently buy an excellent 'ordinary' Mark 2 for less than £15,000. I wonder if the company accountant knows that? ■

Simon Wheeler Classic Cars is based at The Old School House Annexe, School Road, Riseley, Berkshire RG7 1XN, tel 0734 884753, fax 0734 884773.

SECOND OPINION

Graceful seduction

THERE'S something very seductive about the style of the Mark 2 Jaguar. Those curves around the wings, and the way the sleek bonnet hides such a rampant power-house, promise the driver a combination of style and practicality that is impossible to find in modern machinery.

For my money this is the best looking of all Jaguar saloons, but does the allure go a little thin when you're behind the wheel... even when the car in question is a car which has been rebuilt to new-car standards? Does the Beacham Jaguar really compete with present-day Jaguars and BMWs as it needs to if it is to fulfill its role of providing alternative transport for big chiefs of wealthy companies?

Driving it for a few hours during a photo session left me with the impression that it just might be able to live up to that special promise. But the big man behind the wheel would need to be totally aware that this really is a sixties car, and not one which simply looks as though it might be.

Bought simply for that superb Mark 2 shape, as something to stand out from the finance chap's Mercedes and the marketing man's BMW, I think the passion would wane. This is a car for the enthusiastic motorist, the chap who would rather spend Sunday at Silverstone than Henley.

I loved driving it, but then I love old cars and earn my living by writing about them. The crisp bark of the fabulous XK engine, the feel of the wood-rimmed Moto Lita steering wheel and the imprecise gate and 'slow' synchro of the Moss gearbox put me so much at home.

The lack of support on the Connolly leather is compensated for by the feel and smell of it. The



poor visibility outside the car counts as nothing because of the sight of that fabulous fascia. And the body roll when cornering hard is unimportant because all older Jags roll badly.

This is a car I want to drive all day, pushing it hard and fast in the manner of my brief introduction to it. Never mind the old-fashioned thirst and the anti-social noise coming into the sumptuous cabin from engine, exhaust, transmission and wind.

I can forgive the XJ-S rack and pinion steering with its power assistance and consequent lack of feel. And the Kenlowe fan would inspire me with confidence when jammed on a Provençal

autoroute in August.

This is a car I could live with very happily, but I would advise company bosses in the fortunate position of being able to choose one (yes, such people exist even today) to think long and hard. If you're the right sort of person the marriage will be blissful, in a permanent state of consummation. Get it wrong, though, and the union will not be a happy one.

Either way, I think the price tag of £52,875 might cause some soul searching, when five-litre BMW 7-series, Range Rovers and all other Jaguars are cheaper.

Martin Hodder