

You've heard it before, I've got (or had) the first 'something' Jaguar that ever came into the country'. Proving that to be a fact is another matter, and generally when you take it a little further and show interest the proclaimer can be quickly debunked, or else disappears silently into the crowd and is never heard of again. If it hadn't been Stephen Ward, President of the Jaguar Drivers Club Auckland, who said he had the first XJ6 put on the road in Australia, it too could have been dismissed simply as another rash statement which sounded good and embellished the conversation for a short time.

After all, what would Australia's first XJ6 be doing in New Zealand - and who could really say which was the first XJ6 to grace a private garage in Australia? Well, it is all true, and better still, we met the charming original owners and were stunned by the pristine condition of the car! Thirty years on it's probably a little difficult to fully comprehend the intense impact the first XJ6s made on the public, but while we know the classic Jaguar style lines will be preserved into the future with coming models, Sir William Lyons made a radical departure from his traditional rounded bodies when he created the XJ6.

In early 1969 writers in then American magazine Car & Driver tested one and declared the XJ6 to be the best balanced and quietest car they had driven. After thirty years there are very few original examples left in good condition and available for sale, which in itself makes the story of this very early XJ6 quite astounding. The car in question is probably in just as good a condition today as when it rolled out of Browns Lane in 1968, due in large part to the fact that it has never gone through the sad and almost inevitable phase of becoming an unloved old car. This one has been maintained regardless of its monetary value.

Arthur 'Spike' Jones and his charming wife Mary have been Jaguar lovers for practically all of their married lives. He is a very cheery and enthusiastic retired Air New Zealand international pilot, and the pair live in a picturesque Auckland suburb within reach of their family - Back in 1968 however, they lived in Sydney, and in late February of that year Spike wrote to Jaguar Cars in Coventry requesting information on a new 420 which he planned to take delivery of in England during holidays in mid-June. If not then, he would have the new car shipped to Sydney.

He and Mary could not have imagined the obstacles they would come up against over the following twelve months, and he recalls today with a shrug, "I wouldn't want to go through that again." As result of their torment though, they became the first private owners of an XJ6 in Australia! The 420 he dreamed of would be an automatic with all of the 'goodies' including air-conditioning, power steering, radio, chrome wire wheels, and a body finished in either Golden Sand, Opalescent Dark Green or Opalescent Silver Blue. Things looked particularly rosey when he had a reply from

Browns Lane within ten days of his request for information, the writer giving details which narrowed the choice to a 420 in Golden Sand with Beige trim. That was to be their new and first Jaguar - or so they thought! The car would be built within ten weeks, so Spike quickly confirmed he was arriving in London on June 18, but it would be shipped directly to Sydney upon completion. On June 19 in London the dream came even closer to reality when they paid a deposit of £200 to Mr Massey at Henlys in Piccadilly Circus, but four hours later things took a dramatic turn from which they barely recovered until nine months had passed. He and Mary were on holidays, their two young daughters Kathy and

Julie remaining in Sydney with the family of another Air New Zealand pilot friend and his wife, and while they picked up their hire car Mr Massey rang to inform Spike that Jaguar was no longer taking orders for the 420! "It seems nobody had told Henlys about the 420 being dropped, or when the still unknown XJ6 was coming into production, so we quickly talked it over and I left my order in with Henlys for the new model 4.2 litre Jaguar, 'as long as it didn't look like a Mini!!!" Mr Massey assured me it wouldn't, but he couldn't tell me what it looked like, or give any specifications. The only news was that it would be released in London during October."

The Jones' arrived back in Sydney one month later to find a letter from Jaguar with a receipt for the deposit, and assuring them that full details would be forwarded once the release had been made - adding it was most unlikely a car could be delivered before the end of the year. Spike replied by post that he had placed his order in London to avoid delay, and on the understanding that a new Jaguar would be delivered no later than the end of October.

He also told his correspondent, Mr Mashek, that the factory had been closed while they were in England so he had not been able to speak with anyone there, and thus was no further ahead than if he hadn't placed his order for an export model with factory delivery. Feeling the frustration at not already having a new 420 in their possession, he gave Jaguar the option of supplying a 'new model 420 auto (XJ6)' for delivery before the end of October 1968, delivering the current 420 within the same time - or cancelling his order and refunding the deposit ...

Two weeks later a letter arrived from Mr Mashek informing him that the engine size for the new model would not be known until the car was unveiled in early October, but the very earliest delivery would be December ... Thirty plus years on he recalls "Oh what a delight! My mates in Sydney had placed orders with firms like Rover, Alfa Romeo, Fiat, Mercedes-Benz, Ford etc., and their cars were on the water bound for Sydney. I was also told by Jaguar that when I placed the deposit I knew the 420 was to be discontinued, so I replied that Mr Massey had not been aware of that when I paid the deposit on June 19, and believed I would receive a 420 or the coming 1969 model. I confirmed that I would accept one of the 1969 model vehicles as long as it was one of the first cars off the line."

On August 30 Jaguar confirmed the order, but by November 13, over a month after the XJ6 had been shown, Spike had heard no more, so cabled Coventry with the message, "Please advise urgently progress on car, and total cost so that payment will not delay delivery." He also wrote stating that it had been two months since he heard from Jaguar, and asked for information on the XJ6 which he had only heard about in newspaper reports. The next piece of correspondence didn't improve Spike's sense of humour because the letter stated that no cars would be available for individual orders until late February 1969 because models were required for showrooms around the world!

Mr Mashek relayed the news that production would start in mid-January, so the Jones' family car would become available during the last week of February! Spike emphasises that he was then a fiery red head, so not to be put off any further, he replied on November 22 that he was bitterly disappointed, "Especially since I had placed the order on June 19, and it had been confirmed on August 27. However, I told Jaguar I was happy for Bryson Industries in Sydney to use the new car as a show model if management approved

production now. "Obviously things were becoming frantic, but there was finally a breakthrough when on November 28 Jaguar sent me another letter stating that they had written to Roy Drew, the Manager of the Bryson Industries showrooms in William Street Sydney, and informed Mr Drew of the proposal to use my XJ6 as a display vehicle.

On December 3, I posted a cheque for the balance of the payment, £1966.18.0, thanking Jaguar for making an earlier start on the car, and requesting them to contact the RAC or Royal Insurance with details of the chassis and engine numbers so that the car would be covered from the moment it left Jaguar's hands." Coincidentally, Mr Mashek wrote to Spike two days later informing him that they, "Now have a car available, and coming through shortly is XJ6 chassis #IL1225BW, engine #7L1556-8.

The car was registered on December 4, 1968 with the UK numbers UDU109G, and he concluded, "I would like to say how very pleased I am to have been able to help you in this matter, and no doubt you will appreciate that you are one of the very first persons to own such a car, which no doubt, will give you many miles of happy motoring in the future." Spike could not help but remark all of these years later, "I hate to think what would have happened if he had been unhelpful!!!

He didn't know then, but although the car was registered on December 4, 1968, it was not shipped to its new home for seven weeks - January 31, 1969! Spike added, "I am pleased to report though, that finally the car arrived in Sydney on March 10, our youngest daughter Julie's fifth birthday, aboard the ship 'Piako', and that was the end of my correspondence with Jaguar on this matter - thank goodness for that!

However, the car is still my favourite Jaguar, and I have had plenty of others since including two which we also picked up at the factory - with absolutely no delays or problems thanks to the efficiency of people such as Russell Reynolds who became a friend when he ran Jaguar in New Zealand before being headhunted to Jaguar Australia and now Canada. "In recent years we have sold a few of our cars, including a very nice 1964 Daimler V8 250, but our second new Jaguar was a Silver Birch coloured XJ40 which is still Mary's everyday car.

The XJ40 had been released in London in October 1986 and I saw one there in December so ordered one through Russ Reynolds. The delivery time was five months, so we picked it up in May 1987, then in August 1989 we also went to Browns Lane for a new V12 XJ-S Convertible, having delayed the order from December 1988 so that we could use it during the UK summer, and also get the later 'G' registration which was released in August. I think getting the 'G' made it a bit unique because we had two new Jaguars with 'G' registration - but 21 years apart!

We eventually traded the XJ-S on the 1994 V12 Daimler Double Six 'Insignia', so I still had a lovely V12, but this one has the bigger 6.0 litre engine. Oh, what a lovely wife I have - she wanted a 'nice' new Holden Commodore, and not even a V8!" The Jones family did own the first XJ6 privately owned in Australia. The initial Australian display XJ6s were chassis #154, #157 and #158, each completed on October 24, and despatched on November 20 for Perth, Sydney and Melbourne respectively, but they were purely demonstration vehicles until after the first saleable XJ6 arrived in Sydney on June 10, 1969.

"I enjoyed the XJ6 enormously and it was all the things I had hoped it would be. For the first twelve months my wife, two daughters and I did a lot of touring around rural New South Wales once Brysons had finished with it, which wasn't long. My mates too, who had given me a tough time, admired the car enormously. On one drive through Foster, a man who had the Evinrude outboard engine agency there stopped us on the road and asked us to follow him to his home so he could show his wife the new Jaguar.

We got a cup of tea; maybe he rushed off to Brysons and bought their Regency Red demonstrator ... "That vindicated the many letters I had fired off to Coventry, and the frustrations. When we returned to Auckland after my posting ended, the car came with us. There were not many examples here, and again it was the centre of attention. Over the coming years we upgraded it with Series 2 chromed wheels, and because I wasn't too fussed on the original Ascot Fawn,

I had the body stripped and repainted in Silver Birch which I think improved the presentation and matched Mary's Sovereign. "It is genuinely original right down to the carpets and I think stands up very well, but in early 1997 we decided that we had more cars than we needed, and advertised the XJ-S for sale. Then I read in the newspaper that Stephen Ward, the President of the Jaguar Drivers Club in Auckland, had lost his Series 1 XJ6 in a house fire, so I rang him to see if he would be interested in mine. However, he didn't come and look at it until four weeks had passed, so I didn't think he was interested in the old girl.

"I hadn't realised the devastation they were going through, but when Stephen came and saw the car he immediately liked it, and I knew it would be going to the right home - so sadly, we said goodbye. Fortunately, we see the car quite often, the second owners being as in love with it as Mary and I were and we are very happy to know it is preserved." Indeed, Stephen and Denise know they have a real gem, and the 225th RHD XJ6 built is one of the very finest original Series 1 XJ6s in the world today.