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DUAL-PURPOSE
SPORTS CARS
FOR 1959

JAGUAR XK 150S

OF THE SERIES of cars under test, the XK-150 "S" is without doubt the most useable of all on public roads, even when set up for racing. So much so that our sampling was done entirely in Rockland County, a locale which makes up for its lack of private testing grounds with an abundance of rally-worthy black-top serpentine. Owner Bob Grossman has raced this car extensively all summer but it has undergone only two changes from its original condition. A roll bar was installed and Koni shock absorbers replaced

the originals. Though it doesn't interfere with putting up the top, the roll bar does stick through the zip-out back window opening. Perhaps now that winter's here, a bulging back window will be made.

We received quite a few comments from amazed XK-driving readers over our recent test of Jaguar's S-type, so we were pleasantly surprised to find that this car "went" in a markedly different manner from our previous sample. The latter had been driven by just about everybody at the British Press Trials the day before our test

and judging from this later sampling, it just hadn't been going the way it was supposed to. Soon we will have full facts and figures, but for now, here are some driving impressions on a much-raced sample.

A little-known standard fitting on the "S" is a Thornton *Power-Lok* differential, an English-built *Positraction* which eliminates wheelspin when the inside rear wheel "lifts". Thus a really comfortable ride can be achieved with fairly soft springs on a somewhat narrow tread without handicapping the car's controlability.

The *Power-Lok* is available on all current Jaguars as an extra-cost option. We recommend it without reservation to any Jaguar purchaser. Though it's not easy to explain how it works, it does. Besides, it's cheap, unlike the German Z-F device. Equipped with it, no matter how impossible an angle a car may assume (and as race-goers will testify, XK-150's corner at outlandish ones), the driver can still steer the car with a combination of steering wheel and throttle movement. Though they don't look it, they feel very stable to the driver. So much so that we are now re-evaluating some old ideas. One was that maximum cornering power (measured in units of g) is a goal to be pursued at all costs. Costs of expense or comfort, yes, but at the cost of controlability, we must now say, no. Surely rational control right up to and past the peak of adhesion is well worth a slight reduction in the latter.

Since this control is exercised through both the steering wheel and the throttle (or alternatively, the brake pedal), each of these must work in such a way that the driver is constantly in touch with what's going on. In the 150 "S", this is achieved basically through three highly developed systems: the drive train, the steering and the brakes.

The heart of the drive train, the famous XK engine, originally rated at a modest 160 bhp, in this version puts out 250 well behaved horses. Not just sturdy or hairy-legged horses but both strong and well behaved. There is no flat spot in the power curve. No matter what the speed nor how hard the car is cornering, movement of the accelerator provides straight forward, direct control over the power output. All too often a highly tuned racing engine is singularly unsuited to being run below, say, 3000 rpm. If you should be so foolish as to drive one that slowly, when accelerating again the urge comes on with a neck-snapping rush that more than likely makes for singularly awkward moments if you're

in a corner. Quite to the contrary, the S, though powerful, is silky smooth from about 1000 revs upward. A small detail, perhaps, but important: The accelerator pedal itself operates very smoothly; there is no free play and it never sticks. Like the rest of the engine it seems to feel "exact."

Beneath its polished cam covers (attractiveness of the overall layout was one of the several design criteria initially laid down by Sir William Lyons), the working parts are exact and polished too. The hemispherical combustion chambers (later "invented" by Chrysler, but subsequently abandoned as too expensive!) are machined over their entire surface rather than being left in the "as cast" condition.

Since the introduction of the 140 series, XK steering has been by rack and pinion, a mechanism that cannot be bettered for directness of control and reduction of friction. Through a suitable choice of castor angle in the steering, forces remain relatively light even when taking very sharp bends. One drawback of rack and pinion steering should be pointed out, though. That is its inability to insulate the driver from road shocks on irregular surfaces. But for racing on contemporary American circuits this is a negligible factor.

Thanks to Jaguar's leadership at Le Mans in developing disc brakes into a proven production item, brake fade is now as old-fashioned as wheel tramp. The driver of today is in the enviable position of being able to possess a high-performance sports car which actually has more braking capability than it's ever likely to need. Of course, pads can and do wear out, so on the "S" the quick-change variety are used to speed race-maintenance or preparation.

In the case of Bob Grossman's car, there has been very little of the latter. In addition to the afore-mentioned roll bar and shocks, Bob has added the proverbial gas and oil and just "gone racing." He also races an Alfa in G Production and though

it rides on a trailer (boo!!), the S is his personal transportation during race weekends. It is often seen outside one of the nearby night spots, but don't hold this against Bob. He has even lent it to friends the night before a race! How dual purpose can you get?

Just for our benefit, he had the spark plugs changed. After all, they hadn't been out since Watkins Glen. Or was it Bridgehampton? Unnoticed, a brass nipple fell in a plug hole at this time. The clatter resulting when the twin cam six was started caused a lot of head scratching and finally a head was removed (not the mechanic's, the cylinder's). Although this delayed our sampling, all concerned were quite intrigued. Despite some seven or eight races, it seems it had never been off before!

The errant nipple had managed to get caught twixt valve head and piston crown so a fair amount of work was involved and an object lesson learned. Stuff a rag in every open hole.

Early in its career, the Grossman *équipe* fitted Traction-Masters to the rear suspension but these were soon disallowed by the SCCA Contest Board. They are just trailing arm/radius rods, just like the new Corvette features.

If you want to make your own, use a steering tie rod of the appropriate length (shorten one if necessary). Locate one ball joint on the top of the axle housing above the spring mount and the other one on the frame just above the front end of the rear spring. One on each side, of course.

They will help immensely to eliminate wheel judder when your shocks are tired and axle wind-up at any time. But as Bob and others have demonstrated, the Jag can corner quite well without them. It is hoped that they (or a Coventry version) will at least make the Optical Accessories list for '59.

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Opposite page, owner-driver Bob Grossman leads at the start of LISCA's recent Lime Rock race. At left, he corners "on his ear" in SCCA-NY's Regional at Bridgehampton.

Despite awe-inspiring roll angle, S-type corners quickly. One steers with combination of throttle and steering wheel movement.

