

How to turn **RED** into BLACK

In the second half of 1967 Jensen lost £82,000 after making a profit of £183,000 in 1966. Now they are in the black again thanks to a new man at the top, Carl Duerr, 53, Chicago-born but European in outlook. With a weekly output of 17 cars now, the Jensen plant is thriving again. Here we look at the details of manufacture in colour and tell a little of the background story overleaf

**JENSEN AND THEIR
NERVE-CENTRE,
Mr. DUERR**

By Geoffrey Howard





Left: The first car to start the swing to Rostyle wheels was the Interceptor in 1966. Crated behind are body panels from Vignale. Above: The engine is from Chrysler, shipped in crates and "bulled up" slightly for appearance sake



Left: All the trimming is done on the premises with best Connolly hide. Above: Final assembly on two parallel tracks. The car in the foreground is an FF, one per day approximately being built at the moment

Below: Body panels are assembled from rough pressings made in Italy, with the usual lead filling of seams and careful hand finishing to give a perfect surface before painting. Right: Electric arc welding of the main frame on a chassis jig



Left: Line up of a day's production. These are Interceptor Mark 1 models, photographed before the change to Mark 2 specification. Right: With a long background of glass-fibre experience, Jensen use this material for interior panels like the facia and console



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THERE was a time when gaffers made regular trips round the works, getting their faces known to the craftsmen and machine minders. That was in the days when you called the manager "Sir" and he had the power to sack you on the spot. It's all changed now, thanks to trade unions and our progressive society. For better or worse? I'll leave that knotty discussion to the debating students of the latest redbrick.

In the West Bromwich suburb of Birmingham there is still something of this old-world attitude. I've walked through many much larger manufacturing works with the managing director (or a chief engineer at very least) but never have I seen such a response from the men and women on the shop floor. At my side was Carl Duerr, managing director of Jensen, looking more like a cattle millionaire than an industrialist. He was born an American, although he has not lived in the USA since the war. He has that natural American charm and warmth, and the typical knack for remembering first names.

"Hi Burt, how's it going, OK?"

"Morning Mr. Duerr."

"Hey, Sid, is this something new you're working on? It looks good."

"Morning Mr. Duerr."

Some of the backchat was lost in the general hubbub of the panel shop. We

sneaked into the trim shop where an expert was working surreptitiously on a "sparrow" or "foreigner"; it was a telephone rack for Carl's office.

"They spoil me," complained the MD with a grin from ear to ear.

It was the same in each department. Everyone was pleased to see the boss. They were enjoying their work and they had Carl Duerr to thank for the work and for enjoying it. And as a sheet metal finisher explained to me "If I don't do my job proper, he kicks me up the ass!" From the mischievous twinkle in Carl's eye, he probably did too, with the point of his toe.

With a strong background of engineering before the war, Carl got involved in government work. Then the US Army offered him a post in South America as a corporal or in Austria as a colonel.

"I thought about it hard," he said, "for about two seconds!" He went to Austria to help right the country's economy after the war. Then he became a consultant, an industrial trouble-shooter, a top-level expert at pulling companies out of the red into the very firm black. It was in this capacity that he was called in at the end of 1967 by Norcros who owned Jensen at that time.

For Jensen and Norcros 1967 was disaster year. In 1966 they made a profit of £183,000 out of contract assembly of bodies for Austin-Healey and Sunbeam Alpine and Tiger. The Jensen CV8 was only a low-volume model with no great profit margin. Then in 1967 the new US Federal safety regulations hit the big Healey and the Alpine on the head, and Jensen were left in the lurch. Norcros were not happy owning Jensen, especially at this time when the introduction of the new Inter-

ceptor and tooling investments for its body cut back production to three cars per week and brought about a loss of £82,000 for the last six months of the year. About 1,000 workers had to be laid off and the third managing director in three years left.

So January 1968 saw Carl Duerr in the hot seat, a young 52 and bursting with enthusiasm. Two years later the financial side looks healthy, production is running at 17 cars per week and morale is higher than ever. Norcros sold out to Wm Brandt and Sons, merchant bankers, in October 1968; and Carl Duerr bought himself a stake in the Jensen fortunes. He commutes when at the factory from a suite in the Albany Hotel, Birmingham, arriving in his office before 8 a.m. and often staying until 9 at night.

The rest of the time he lives with his German wife in Munich, where he still operates a consultancy business, registered in Lichenstein.

Astute, experienced, wise and gifted, all these adjectives apply to Carl Duerr the man, and they have helped him turn the books at Jensen. What fired him right from the start, though, was a love for the product, because in many ways the Interceptor is like Mr. Duerr—it has an American heart and a European mantle. Like the rest of top management at Jensen, Carl takes away the latest car off the line each night, to keep a check on standards. In 33 months they have made 1,000 Interceptors, which must have shaken the old-timers who took 32 years to build the first 1,000 Jensens. And they are building them better now than ever before, because they have more fun doing it. □

Something of the happy link between workers and management shows on their faces in this picture as Carl Duerr hands the 1,000th Interceptor to Pat Follett, managing director of Charles Follett Ltd, the largest Jensen distributor in the UK. Mr. Duerr is wearing the light jacket

