

Firmengeschichte

Although the Jensen brothers changed the name of W J Smith, the original incorporation date of that company would still apply, would it not? Hence the 1922 date, perhaps.

In fact, when Kjell Q acquired the company he set his team to work to try and prove the earliest foundation date in order to impress US customers, always keen on antiquity, I believe. I think that they managed to trace the origins back to around the 1880's and incorporated this in one of the sales brochures, although the links were a bit tenuous. The idea was to establish a link with historical coachbuilding history, and why not.

Alan und Richard Jensen, Norcros

Both Jensen brothers had been in poor health since the late 1950s, which had prompted them, in 1959, to apply to and become members of the Norcros Group, a Holding Company created by John Sheffield to take over family businesses which had good growth prospects, but which faced potential financial problems such as death duty tax. The agreement was that Alan and Richard would stay and run the company for five years, alternating each year for the position of chairman. In the meantime Norcros would recruit a new managing director to take over when the brothers retired, scheduled for 1964/5. The financial boost provided by Norcros allowed Jensen to take on the Volvo P1800 contract and future developments for sub-contract work for Rootes, which led to their association with Chrysler when the Rootes Group were taken over by them. *

Alan Jensen retired in 1963 after further health problems but remained on the Board. In 1966 Richard, again on medical advice, resigned as chairman but also stayed on the Board. So, although Alan and Richard Jensen, and Eric Neale of course, were strongly against the handing over of car design to Touring/Vignale and they resigned, their departure was in line with their contract with Norcros. By this time Kevin Beattie was well established as Chief Engineer and Richard Graves newly arrived as Marketing Director, ready to take the company forward.

Does anybody in Australia remember the appalling gaff made at the first Sydney Motor Show following this takeover? In order to promote the new company, thousands of plastic carrier bags were handed out with literature at the show, proudly bearing the message 'Chrysler Rootes Australia'! If this means nothing to you, ask an Australian.

Austin Gypsy

Between 1958-61 Jensen were involved in building Gypsy bodies. Calver says, on page 210, that the exact number is unknown but believed to be in the hundreds. As many will know, the Gypsy was virtually useless compared with the Land Rover, in part due to its independent rear end. Blue Star Garages had the contract for petrol and emergency recovery work based on the M1 at Newport Pagnell, and they chose a Gypsy as the small recovery vehicle. The AA were constantly having to rescue both the stricken motorist and the Gypsy from the soft 'had shoulder', often pulling both out at the same time with their Land Rover!

C-V8 in New York

There was a story going around about two CV8s sent to New York for the motor show, one for the stand and a demonstrator. The demonstrator went missing, after being passed around the Press and others by Fergus Fine cars, and, it is said, was never found...

Fabrikareal am Kelvin Way



The picture shows the full extent of the site, which did not extend further to the left than the trailer with car bodies on it, bottom left. Austin Healey bodies?

The admin block, with the Jensen Motors Ltd sign, housed MD's office and boardroom, Company Secy's office and the sales and sales promotion depts. Above were the two management canteens and director's dining room, where visitors would be entertained. Those were the (bad) old days when the shop floor and management were kept separate other than by occasional visits down the production line. Duerr changed this, by being the first in to the factory in the morning, well last to leave, and by learning the names of all the production workers and most of their families within the first few months of becoming MD. Two management canteens became one, but the directors/visitors dining room stayed for obvious reasons.

Behind the admin block is the Austin Healey production line, later to be the Interceptor/FF lines. The building nearest the canal is where the chassis jigs were located, and moving towards the admin block were the body in white lines (where the basic body panels were attached to the chassis and lead loaded. Opposite is the paint shop and fibreglass workshop from which the bodies returned to be trimmed and finally motorised.

Where Denis remarks hit home in terms of the size of the site is that by December 1967 all that space was devoted to building 3 /4 Interceptors/FFs per week! With about 1200 employees! This is where Norcros called in management consultants Booze Allen and Hamilton to sort it all out, resulting in the appointment of Carl Duerr. Among many suggestions, Booze Allen recommended the sacking of the entire Sales Department, fortunately ignored by Duerr!

One reason for their recommendation, I think, was their request for the sales office (me!) to provide the total market for luxury cars likely to be alternatives choices to Jensens. I had just joined from BMC Marketing Research, and my late work there was to examine the market for 3 litre cars in the UK. Having this still at my fingertips, so to speak, I came up with the figure of 15 thousand per year for all cars Jaguar and upwards. I was told to go away and prove it, and so back tracked over the figures with an update for the year since I had done the work. Unfortunately the registration figures for imports were always about six months behind the others, so I had to double up the previous six months for this small sector to get an average. The result came to exactly 14,998, and you will not be surprised to learn that these were totally derided by Booze Allen as being a fix!

To the right of the admin block, across the gap, was the Sunbeam Tiger production line and, earlier, the Volvo line, and of course the 541 and CV8 production buildings. What the large hole with potential building works at the top right is, I do not know, but I think it was later used for works parking and eventually Jensen Parts and Service??

PS I forgot to say that also on the floor above the sales office in the admin building was the home of the IBM3 computer, installed I think around 1972/3, which took the space of several Victorian style wardrobes! And probably with the computing power of an Amstrad !

Peter O'Hare, Verkäufer bei Jensen

One year we had a sales rep called Peter O'Hare who had joined us from BMW UK with whom, we later discovered, he had a quite a history and his departure from them was not entirely voluntary, and somewhat sudden. He was a real character, very amusing and a very persuasive salesman. During the show a couple of Aston Martin people appeared on the stand and Peter made them sell the Interceptor to themselves against their own cars; very neatly done and fascinating to listen to. Anyway, back to the Hunter estate.

One morning someone was wanting to use it but it was not in the park, apparently it had been used by Peter the night before. So when he arrived on the stand he was questioned about the car but suddenly became very vague about where it was and some story about a breakdown or other problem was mentioned, but no chance of

getting the car that morning. Later in the day it reappeared in the car park, but with no explanation of where it had been.

It was quite some time after the show, and probably after Peter had moved on, that we learned what had happened. Apparently Peter was having a jolly time in a pub after the show had closed with group of friends among whom there was an extremely attractive young lady. Never one to miss an opportunity, particularly a challenge, Peter smartly whisked the girl away and enjoyed a mutually enjoyable interlude with her- in the Hunter estate outside the pub. Having sorted themselves out Peter, looking at his watch, said 'there is just time for another drink before they close, so Ill leave you to finish dressing and see you inside, taking the car keys with him! Unbelievable, but absolutely true!

Now, the story doesn't end there. The young lady, rightfully extremely miffed, called the police. When they arrived she pleaded that she was a helpless lass who had dropped here car keys down the drain in the road and please could the nice policemen help her? (light snuffle and tear in the corner of her eye etc). They promptly did and arranged for an auto locksmith to come and provide a spare key, and off she went away. Peter, having finished his last drink, came out to find out where she was and lo, there was no lass and no car! Enquiries among the friends still in the pub revealed that the lass was the girl friend of the head of a local 'mob'. renowned for being a hard man and known to threaten death to anyone who 'messed with his bird'. Peter found out where this fellow lived and went round to the block of flats, to find the Hunter outside the guy's house. For once, and very wisely, Peter left it there and retired to think things out. At around midday the next day he went back and quickly.

Peter left us not long afterwards, and we heard that he had joined the sales department at Qvale's San Francisco showrooms. Later we heard that he had fallen out with them, apparently over the cost of personal telephone calls which he refused to pay, saying that Kjell had more money than him and let him pay! Later David Millard found him running a bar on the beach near Barcelona. Finally, some fifteen or so years ago, working as a gamekeeper on an estate somewhere in the Hampshire area, I believe, he his the press having committed suicide after shooting his married lover. Some members in that part of the world will remember the story more accurately than I.

Mittlerer Osten

A A Zayani and Sons were the agents for a relatively short period and not many cars were sold there. They were appointed in late 1973, and I paid them a visit in Feb '74. Lovely place to visit and lovely people. The group which extended down the whole gulf coast has since been broken up, I hear. Khalid Z, my contact in Bahrain, and one or more of his brothers now run a financial institution... I am not sure exactly what his relationship was, but he was certainly a member of the royal family.

I remember Khalid Z visiting the factory and telling me that he had been in London to finalise the purchase of a place for members of the family to stay while visiting London to avoid having to use hotels, a fairly frequent event.

'Where?', I asked.

'Mount Street', came the reply.

'An apartment? I suggested.

'Oh no, a block of apartments of course, we are a very big family!'

Well, one would, wouldn't one!

Manor House

I remember only one meeting for UK dealers held near the factory, otherwise we used the Carlton Tower in London, hotels local to some dealers for promotion event and, of course, Earls Court.

Overseas dealers and visitors usually stayed in the Garden House on the Hagley Road or the Albany (where Carl Duerr lived during his tenure).

Favoured place for local eating was The Manor House in West Brom, then a really swell run establishment with excellent food; I do not think that this reputation has survived. Incidentally the Manor House was much more popular for photo shoots. The timbered walls suggest they might be the Oak House, as in the very first Jensen-Healey shots.

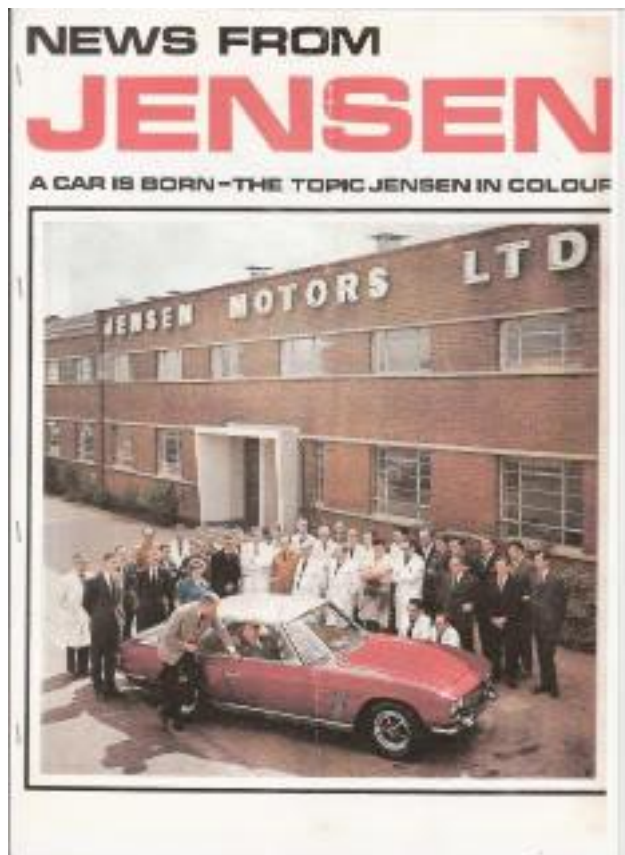
Topic Interceptor, Belegschaft

Most will have seen this or have a copy already, but if not, this is the day Carl Duerr handed over the Topic Interceptor to John Ball.

Over the past months I have ben trying to put names to those in the picture, and now have all except five which, counting from the left, are numbers 10, 18 (white coat, glasses, looking down), 20 (suit and tie next to him), and 21-23 inc.

So, with job desc if poss: Arthur Harper (final road test), R A Graves, Peter Swain, Alan Spicer (brown coat) D B Millard (suit and tie), -'Jenks' (full name n/k), Sam James (paintshop foreman), Tommy Beards, Maud (Service Dept valet), 10 n/k, Ray Chester(Superintendent production line), Alan Everton, Ron Turner, George Gallimore, Des Blakeman (electrician), Bert Thomas, Harry Cottell (JML legend!), 18 n/k, - Belcher, 20-24 n/k, 25 Jim Winton (Service Dept Receptionist), Alf Parmley, Barry Walker (engineering), G J Wyndham Powell (Sales Manager), Bill Silvester (Works Foreman), Brian Spicer (Deputy Chief Engineer), Jim Padley (Works Manager), Gordon Holt (Purchasing), Kevin Beattie, and behind the bonnet are Harry Taylor and Arthur Holloway (Final inspection team).

I had just become Export Sales Manager, and was off in the wild blue somewhere.



Dodge Charger

One of JML's ideas, before the Jensen-Healey came along, was to do a proper Jensen coachbuilding job on an American muscle car. Accordingly we bought a Dodge Charger with that in mind, and planned to sell the idea to Chrysler. Nothing came of the idea, but I remember a few very entertaining trips made in it. At about the same time I went with one of the Beherman family (Belgian importers) from Brussels to Ghent in a Charger with 'Shaker Hood' ram air system. God, what a monster. Our return journey was in one of the first Rover 3500 V8s, and what a superb ride that was in comparison! I have always been a fan of the Rover 2000 series and am constantly surprised at how cheap they are today.

Ah well...

Nova

I am pretty sure that this is not as Vignale originally built it. It was fairly extensively modified, I believe in the late 60's or early 70's and I think this was after it was involved in a fairly major accident. Somewhere in the JOC there is a photo which I gave to Alan Smith of the original car, and this may now be in the hands of club archivist John Lane. Better still, I am sure the present owner has the history at his fingertips and was there not a comprehensive article in a JOC Mag not long ago?

Jensen had no plans for the car at all, it was purely a Vignale design exercise on a shortened Interceptor chassis. At my interview in June 1967 I proclaimed my knowledge of Jensen by trotting out facts gleaned from press reports on the car, and was politely told the truth! If Jensen had gone the 2+2 route they would have built the P66; in fact Dick Graves said in a recent letter that he wished they had done so. Either way, the Interceptor/FF programmes would still have gone ahead, four seats being considered imperative.

Schliessung der Fabrik in 1976

Sad memories, of course, but from a distance. In 1976 I was running a Lancia dealership on the Lancashire/Cumbria border (anyone up there remember Charlie Oates Wayside Garage north of Carnforth?) and I had had very little contact with West Bromwich for two years... ..However, when I left in 1974 it was pretty obvious that there was going to be big trouble ahead with the collapse of the big engined cars market and the disastrous effect of the badly turned out early Jensen-Healeys.

The really sad thing is that according to some more knowledgeable than I the demise of Jensen was avoidable, but the 'carrot' of the Subaru franchise determined that Jensen be sacrificed in favour of the new International Motors. Note that the way the company was liquidated left plenty of room for recovery if market conditions improved. Three companies were formed: Jensen Motors Ltd was production and allowed to go bust, Jensen Parts and Service self explanatory, and Jensen Special Products was the engineering and development part. I think all the production jigs and tools were owned by Parts and Service, certainly they were not included in the liquidation.

The above is only a general view of what happened, all will be revealed in the not too distant future, I understand.