

LHD FF, Crans Montana

I believe there was a mock-up made but I was not aware of this when I was at the factory. Dick Graves told me that the idea had to be abandoned because the Ferguson unit would not run upside down; as an asymmetrical unit this would mean a new unit and new chassis for an LHD car, the development costs of which were beyond company resources

I remember a rather 'heavy' evening in Crans Montana with some of the Swiss dealers during which many pencil drawings were made on a variety of serviettes proving that a chain link from the steering column across the engine bay bulkhead to a modified steering rack mounting would be a simple thing and, 'Voilà!, we 'ave the problem solved!' .

... Someone asked for the price of an Interceptor MkII not long ago, and I can now confirm that in March 1970 the price was £4470 basic, £5838 incl tax. The FF was £5900 and £7705 respectively. Not hard to see why the FF was eventually dropped, despite its tech advantages but the fact that no LHD was available.

One winters night in Crans Montana, after a day of ski bob and an evening of Raclette and suitable beverages, Charlie Bonvin, Jensen dealer in Sion, Edgar Schwyn and myself had drawn up plans for converting rhd FFs to lhd, using a very neat assembly of chains linking the original steering column to a shortened column over on the left side of the firewall. Schimple, tsk? I could never understand the engineering department being reluctant to put this into effect when I returned to the factory!

... Regrettably the 'myth' concerning an LHD version of the FF is hard fact. The problem we had with the FF was due to the Ferguson unit not being able to be run upside down, which it would have had to do if a mirror image conversion was used. With the chassis as designed by Jensen this was the only possibility in order to make room for the steering in an LHD configuration. Believe me, we were well aware that, despite the stiff price, the LHD export market was of considerable value to us and which might well have been sufficient to reduce unit cost and prolong the life of it and future models.

With a monocoque chassis and smaller engine block the story is very different, as this Mustang proves. However, still nobody took it up, which I suspect was mainly due to cost and weight penalties.

Could Jensen have designed a better chassis? Most likely yes, but at the time the only affordable way of producing the FF was by converting the Interceptor chassis. While it was not a commercial success in itself, the value of the FF in terms of publicity for the company was enormous, far better than any amount of advertising we could have paid for.

...Anybody know the whereabouts of 127/308? Originally delivered to Edgar Schwyn in August 1971? Also 127/282 sold in April 1971, via a London dealer, possibly Follett, to a gentleman in Frankfurt. This is known to have been very badly damaged in 1973, and possibly written off. Registration was F-CM-33. Either of these two could be part of the LHD story.

FF, Edelstahl Dach

It was the FF that was originally scheduled to have a stainless steel roof, not the Interceptor. The first single sheet FF brochure shows a red car with stainless roof, and this had been printed before the decision was made to cancel the idea. Hence the first FF's had silver painted roofs to match the brochure!

... I personally always thought that the Charcoal Grey, Silver Grey roof and Red trim was the best combination we ever did, but obviously not to everyone's taste. To my mind it gave the car a real sense of class.

... Kevin Beattie's idea was to use a stainless steel roof, but early experience with a prototype proved that there were too many problems and the idea was abandoned. By this time, however, the preliminary single page brochure (red car/silver roof) was already being printed. So that is why all FFs were scheduled to have silver roofs!

Strange, but true!