

Jensen Car Club of Switzerland



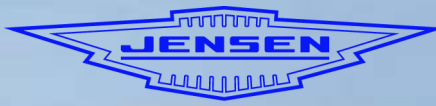
THE LIST

'It reminds me of being behind the wheel of a powerboat'



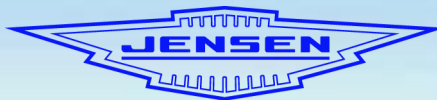
Experiencing Jensen's advanced four-wheel-drive FF has been a lifelong ambition for reader Colin Strickland. Will a day behind the wheel live up to the dream or puncture it?

Words: ADAM TOWLER Photography: GF WILLIAMS



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Colin was disappointed at first, until the FF started to work its spell



COLIN STRICKLAND

Colin loves contrasts - he drives a Mercedes E500 and has a classic Mazda MX-5 for fun.

His car CV includes large-engined BMWs, a Volkswagen Golf GTI and other small and nimble cars.

So letting him loose in a Jensen FF should be an easy win...

HIS WISHLIST

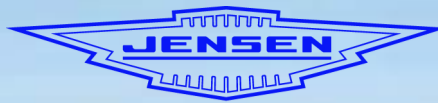
- Ford Escort Mexico
- Jensen FF
- Triumph Stag
- Triumph TR6
- Porsche 911
- Ferrari 308 GT4
- Ford Mustang
- Ford Galaxie
- Ford Cortina GT/GXL MkIII
- Mercedes R107 Coupé

This feature is all about *Classic Cars* readers meeting their heroes, and heroes don't come much bigger, broader shouldered or more bombastic than Jensen's ambitious transcontinental battle cruiser: the Anglo-American-Italian concoction that was the FF. This is a big car with an astounding specification sheet, given that it made its debut at the Earls Court Motor Show in 1966. Features including four-wheel drive and anti-lock brakes earned it *Car* magazine's Car of the Year for 1967.

For Colin Strickland, his love for it goes back to his childhood and a classic Seventies crime caper, *The Protectors*, conceived by Gerry Anderson. 'The mastermind of the show, Harry Rule (played by Robert Vaughn), drove an Interceptor MkII, and it made quite an impression on me at the time, as did the Jensen's inclusion in the *Daily Express* Motor Show guide that I pored over as a child.'

For Colin, the big Jensen was part of an elite collection of dazzling high-performance cars that used American muscle to hit the numbers usually reserved for highly strung European metal.

It's a decidedly chilly, overbearingly grey December's day when Colin parks his 2006 Mercedes-Benz E500 in the car park of Cropredy Bridge Garage, a firm specialising in Jensen cars since 1973. The Merc is a clue that our reader loves a big V8 and his list of dream drives has leanings to American V8 power, along with British sporting cars, as well as homegrown Ford legends. His current classic is a Mazda MX-5, but he justifies driving the E500



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JENSEN FF MkII THE LIST

'You just squeeze the throttle and off it goes'



daily by keeping the mileage low and using an LPG conversion, 'I'm enjoying big V8 petrol engines while we still can,' he says.

We both sink down into the cockpit of Matt Walsh's 1970 FF, and dream. The first owner was apparently the superstar rock and jazz drummer Ginger Baker, and it's fun to imagine the escapades of early Seventies excess it must have witnessed. If only cars could talk.

Well, cars *can* talk, sort of. Especially the FF, with 6.3 litres of Chrysler powerhouse rumbling away under the long bonnet.

The FF was launched in tandem with the Interceptor, but though they look quite similar the cars are quite different under the skin, and the FF never wore the Interceptor badge. They appear identical from the A-pillar backwards, but the FF has a four inches longer wheelbase, with double as opposed to single vents aft of the front wheels and a brighter front grille.

The FF combined the 383ci Chrysler V8, and its 325bhp and 425lb ft of torque, with a four-wheel-drive system developed by Ferguson Research. This drivetrain specification alone would have been enough to wow onlookers – 15 years before the advent of the Audi quattro – but Jensen also incorporated Dunlop Maxaret anti-lock brakes from the aircraft industry. Factor in optional power steering (not standard until 1969) and a Thornton Powr Lok differential, and the FF was bristling with driver aids – all wrapped up in a glamorous steel body penned by Touring but readied for production and initially built by Vignale. Suddenly that Aston Martin didn't seem quite so appealing to the well-heeled GT buyer.



Interior is snug thanks to transmission tunnel; steering too light for Colin



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FF drivers are faced with a commanding cliff of a dashboard, packed with dials and oversized rocker switches that could be operated while wearing snow mittens. 'For such a big car it feels quite small in here,' says Colin and he's right – it is a big car, but the massive centre tunnel divides the car neatly into two. Behind, two pews in almost cinema style make the FF a practical GT. We edge cautiously out on to a Warwickshire back road; it really feels a bit narrow for a car like the FF, but with a background gurgle from the V8 we surge off up the road.

Colin's initial thoughts soon follow, and they're not all positive. 'It is really relaxing to drive,' he says. 'You just squeeze the throttle and off it goes. It's just like driving my Merc. It's really easy to drive, but the steering is so low-g geared and it's very, very light. Would it be usable every day? I'm not sure. I think the Eighties is the sweet spot if you want to do that with a classic car.'

And while the Chrysler V8 has the numbers on paper, it also has 1920kg to carry around. Driven via a three-speed Torqueflite automatic gearbox, the result was rapid for the era but not stunning

THE EVOLUTION



1966 MkI Interceptor and longer, four-wheel drive and ABS-equipped FF launched at the Earls Court Motor Show. Power is from a 6.3-litre Chrysler big block V8, with (rare) manual or Torqueflite transmissions.



1969 Changes include improved front suspension, radial tyres and Girling brakes. Power steering is standard. MkII versions of both models, with changes to the exterior (wider wheels) and new interior.



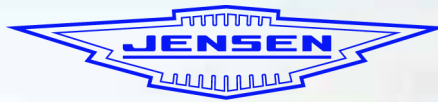
1971 FF replaced by the SP, a rear-wheel-drive car with a 440ci, 7.2-litre big block V8 and three double-barrel carburettors. Interceptor gets the same interior and exterior changes (GKN alloys), to become the MkIII.



1973 As emissions regulations strangle the 6.3-litre Chrysler engine, Jensen fits 'normal' Interceptors with the 7.2-litre unit, albeit in a lower state of tune with a single four-barrel carburettor.



1974 A drop-top version of the Interceptor, featuring a hydraulically powered canvas roof, appears. A Jensen Interceptor Convertible makes an appearance in *The Omen* film in 1976.



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'With that engine you'd forgive it anything. It's great for wafting around in, or – I imagine – 80-100mph drives'



Ferguson four-wheel drive and Dunlop Maxarad anti-lock brakes make the FF's power and weight easy to handle

by modern standards: Jensen quoted 0-60mph in eight seconds and a top speed of 133mph.

'I put my foot down,' says Colin as he mashes the accelerator pedal, 'and not a lot happens. It reminds me of being behind the wheel of a powerboat – a sudden rise in revs as you apply the power but without really making you go anywhere.'

I do see Colin's point. The steering is light and needs considerable arm-twirling, particularly on twisting roads, while the mix of mass, an auto box and a torque-heavy V8 was always going to make for a

car that favours effortless speed over instant, snappy acceleration. But then something strange happens: the FF starts to work its magic. It's interesting to watch, because it's clear Colin is a genuinely passionate car enthusiast. His initial disappointment, while hidden under a veil of politeness, was almost painful to observe. And then I notice that his driving is adapting to the car, and that we're making smooth, fast progress in a manner all the best Jensen drivers must have made in period. A smile breaks out on Colin's face. 'Once you get used to it, it just goes,' he remarks. 'You put the window down, hear the noise, and it's just brilliant. They say never meet your heroes, but once you get used to the steering... and with that engine you'd forgive it anything. It's great for wafting around in, or – I imagine – 80-100mph drives.'

Colin's driving and body language speak louder than his words. He's relaxed in the seat now, guiding the FF with economical movements from the shoulders, and carrying momentum on the road. Our pace is far from frantic, but we're cracking on now and it's rewarding to experience the FF doing what it loves best. 'The ride is not bad at all either,' says Colin, which is true in spite of its more humble suspension layout. 'I'm just enjoying the ambience.'

For me, the FF feels like an unstoppable force, metaphorically speaking. There's nothing wrong with the ABS-equipped brakes, which have a modern-feeling response to the pedal.

The car seems born to crush long distances in all sorts of weather conditions and in supreme luxury. The fact that you can launch

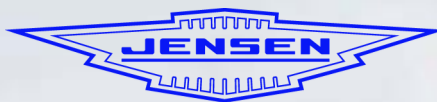


1975 Rare Interceptor coupé launched using Jaguar XJ rear window, but only 54 make it into production as the end for Jensen Cars nears. Production of all cars ends with administration of the company in 1976.



1983 Interceptor back in production as the Series 4, lasting until the Eighties when firm is sold. Series 5 never makes production; later years see modernised S and R Interceptors built by various specialists.

One of three FFs that
Ginger Baker owned.
Now you don't need to be
a rock star to afford one



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energetically from a side road without a hint of wheelspin in these conditions is not lost on either of us. For a Sixties GT, the FF is extraordinarily well planted.

I'd love to take this car on a Europe-wide adventure to explore how it reacts to different roads. I suppose the only hitch in that plan would be the vast fuel reserves required for the trip. Cropredy Bridge Garage's Bob Cherry says, 'As an ownership proposition it's the fuel consumption that kills it.'

By the end of our drive I can see that the FF has lodged itself steadfastly into Colin's affections, and I'm sure it'll be one on the list when the lottery numbers come in. 'I started off thinking that it was really hard work but I'm so glad I've driven it now.' Given that when he'd switched his radio on at home that morning, the theme to *The Protectors* had been playing, it's fitting that the appeal of this landmark car has won through.

What's rather more telling are some of the thoughts Colin sent me after his day with the car. 'Other than the steering, getting back into the Mercedes didn't feel so different from the FF, despite the 35-year gap. In both I was being wafted along using the torque of the V8.'

It says a lot about the car's abilities that a Jensen from the Sixties can match a Mercedes from the past decade.

Thanks to: Bob Cherry at Cropredy Bridge Garage (cropredybridge.com, 01295 758159), Tim Clark at the Jensen Owners' Club (joc.org.uk) and car owner Matt Walsh.

1970 JENSEN FF MkII

Engine 6276cc, V8, two overhead valves per cylinder, four-barrel Carter AFB 2798S carburettor **Power and torque** 330bhp @ 5000rpm; 425lb ft at 2800rpm

Transmission Torqueflite 722 three-speed automatic, Ferguson four-wheel drive

Brakes 273mm solid discs front and rear

Suspension Front: wishbones, double coil springs and telescopic damper units. Rear: live axle, semi-elliptic leaf springs, telescopic dampers

Steering Rack and pinion, power steering **Weight** 1727kg **Performance** 0-60mph: 8.1 sec; top speed: 141mph

Fuel consumption 14mpg

Cost new £7705 1s 5d **Value now** £7000 (rough) to £40,000 (concours)

WANT A DRIVE?

Classic Cars will make a dream drive happen for one reader in every issue. All you need to do to be in the reckoning is to send us your list of the ten cars you dream most of driving, plus a CV of the classic cars you've owned, then fire it off to classic.cars@bauermedia.co.uk. You'll need to be prepared for the possibility of long-distance travel and an early-morning start, but the experience will be unforgettable.



Torque Chrysler V8 rewards a fast, smooth driving style



Everything must go at the closing down sale at the factory in 1978

JENSEN – THE WORLD'S FIRST ZOMBIE CAR COMPANY?

The firm's been killed many times over, but the allure of the Interceptor means that the name continues to rumble back into life

THE INTERCEPTOR may well be Jensen's most readily identifiable product, but it also heralded a tumultuous period for the company that hasn't really stopped since. The Jensen brothers – Richard and Alan – left the company in 1966 before the new model was launched, as did in-house designer Eric Neale. The then owners, the Norcross Group (who had taken control in 1959), sold out in 1968.

After it passed through the hands of Brandt Bank, Kjell Qvale became majority shareholder in 1970, introducing the SP and MkIII. But the 1973 fuel crisis hit the company badly, and it went into administration in 1976. The remnants of the operation were split in two, becoming Jensen Special Products (for the research side of the business) and Jensen Parts and Service. These were bought by Britcar Holdings – and Jensen Parts and Service would then win the franchise to import Subaru, later becoming International Motors.

The rights to the name and car production were sold to Ian Orford in 1982, who rescued the brand and put the Series 4 into production a year later. Only 15 of these were built during the Eighties, and only one was right-hand drive, before he sold to another firm called Unicorn Holdings in 1988. With the onset of the recession, and in particular the collapse of the classic and prestige car market, Jensen

(now known as Jensen Car Co Ltd) ran again into difficulties and the mooted Series 5 never made production. The firm went into voluntary liquidation in 1993, and with it the original Jensen finally died.

Later that decade the name returned once more, applied to a roadster from a company called the Creative Group and powered by a Ford Mustang V8. It was known as the SV8 but again the project ran into financial difficulties after showing plenty of promise and significant investment – and was shut down after

just a handful of cars were built in the early 2000s. Before the operation folded a concept coupé model had also been shown.

In the years since there have been attempts at

marketing Interceptors with modernised engines and running gear, known as the Interceptor S and, latterly, the Interceptor R. The most recent project to launch an all-new Interceptor also hit problems when the group behind the venture, CPP Holdings in Coventry, went into administration in 2012. Early design sketches had looked very promising.

It's heartening that despite the harsh realities of trying to run a specialist car manufacturing business, with all of its cash flow problems and potential pitfalls, there seems to be no shortage of enthusiasts and business people prepared to try to keep the Jensen marque alive.

'The reality of trying to run a car manufacturing business is fraught with pitfalls'

