

# NEWS FROM

# JENSEN

A CAR IS BORN—THE TOPIC JENSEN IN COLOUR



Last month Topic Managing Director and Motoring Correspondent John B. Ball took delivery of a unique Jensen Interceptor. Tailor-made to his own specifications, the car is finished in a new colour which has since been registered as 'Topic Red' . . .

John Ball himself tells the story of an idea and how it was transformed into a £5,000 reality . . .

# A Car is Born



## The Topic Jensen Interceptor

At last year's Motor Show, a group of motoring journalists sat in the bar talking shop. They were joined by a well-known figure in the trade, who threw down the gauntlet over his round of drinks, and asked each one of us to suggest the car we would most like to own. My turn came, and I plumped for the British-made Jensen.

Several gin and tonics later, the idea had

taken root. Eventually, after prolonged discussions, Jensen Motors Limited agreed to build a special version of their Interceptor to be known henceforth as the *Topic Jensen*.

For the next ten weeks I found myself almost living with a pile of tubular steel and watched it grow into what has been called "the most advanced car of our times".

The Jensen logo is a stylized blue and white emblem. It features a central shield-like shape with a pointed top and bottom, containing the word "JENSEN" in a bold, sans-serif font. The shield is flanked by two curved lines that suggest a car's body or wings. Below the shield is a horizontal line with a series of small, evenly spaced rectangular notches, resembling a gear or a decorative element.

**JENSEN**

## A Car is Born

It was a wet Wednesday morning in February when I arrived at Jensen's West Bromwich factory, together with a photographer. My first view of the car—an innocuous pile of tubular steel—which, two months later, was to turn every head, did nothing to dispel the dream-like quality of the whole experience.

In realizing my own lifelong ambition, I must have experienced something of the feelings of the brothers Richard and Alan Jensen who, in 1934, built the prototype of the first Jensen. Each successive model was a mechanical milestone, but the crossroads came in 1962, when the CV8—with a huge American Chrysler V8 engine fitted into a fibreglass body—went into production. The next four years saw over 500 units of this marque built.

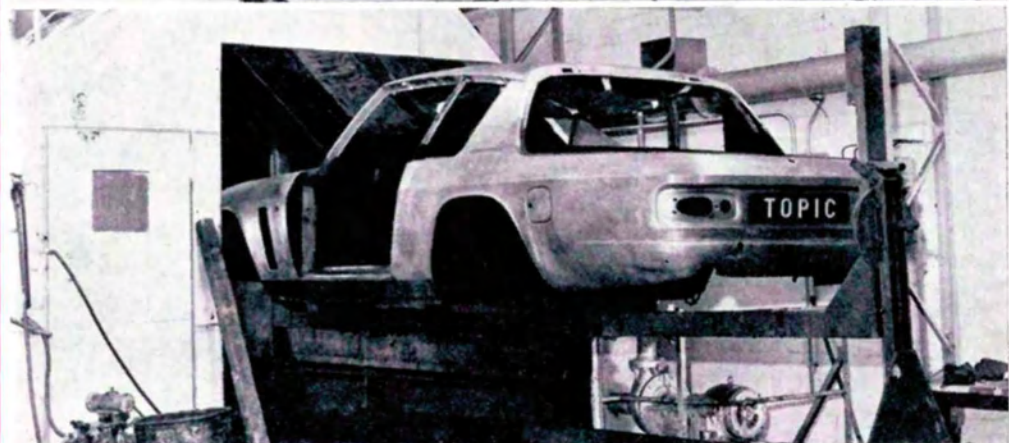
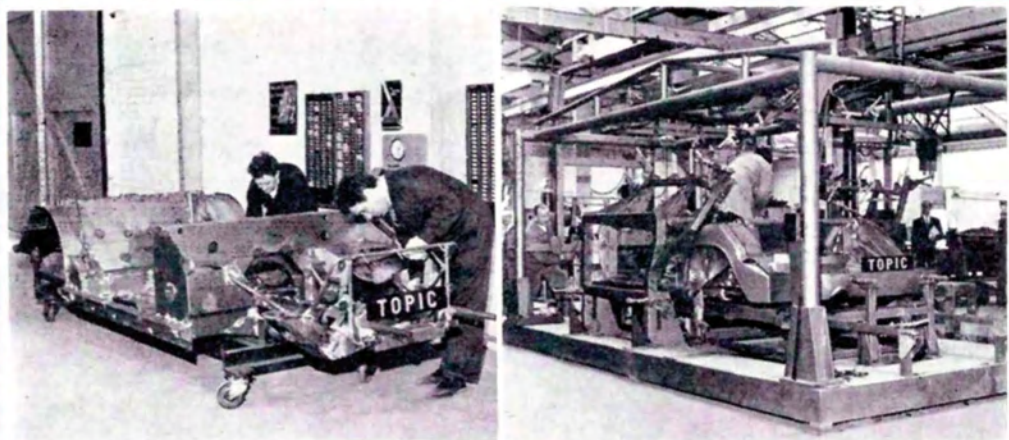
### The New Design

During this period of production, the West Bromwich Engineering Division had been hard at work and the result of their efforts—a prototype called the P66—appeared at the 1965 Earls Court Show. The car made a tremendous impact on the public, but its production clearly needed long-term planning. In fact, that car never went into production. The engineering of the Mark III CV8, as it was called, was near to perfection; all that was needed was a new body design. Jensen's turned to the Italians for the new styling. Their requirement was a new, exciting International design which still retained certain features of the famous Jensen tradition. The eventual design was a combination of Turin flair and West Bromwich know-how, and the first prototype was built.

Certain modifications were obviously necessary, the most radical being the all-important decision to put the model into production, this time in steel. So the Interceptor was born.

### A Week's Work

It took just over a working week, 44 hours to be precise, to build the chassis frame for the *Topic Interceptor*. The main chassis members—twin parallel bars of tubular steel, immensely



*A story in pictures: the completed chassis passes to the body pressing jig. The doors and boot lid are fitted by hand before the completed bodyshell is finished and cleaned for painting. The bottom picture shows the bodyshell rising from the first paint dip.*



strong and as thick as a man's thigh—were supported by a complex sub-frame of less thick tubular steel. As the chassis passed on to its later stages, specially strengthened bulkheads were welded into position at front and rear. It was first at this stage and many times in later processes that the high degree of skilled workmanship that goes into the complete Jensen was demonstrated.

The completed chassis looked strong enough to have been made for a tank and the prospect of having so much steel around me was very reassuring.

The chassis was then loaded on to a trolley and despatched to the Body Building Section. Here, the first jig accepted the chassis frame, while the interior and body panelling and inner wheel arches were welded into position.

This angular contraption then entered the second jig and emerged, looking for the first time like a motor car, with all of the outer body panels and the roof in position.

At this stage, the *Topic* car, its dull silver pressed metal looking more sinister than glamorous, moved on its trolley to another section of the Works, where the bonnet and boot lids were fitted and the doors hung.

Close examination of the bodyshell revealed a hundred or more minor operations superbly welded together.

Prior to painting, she went to the Lead Loading Division, where craftsmen ran molten lead into all the welded seams and joints which, when smoothed and covered with paint, are completely undetectable.

At this stage the bodyshell was completed, and underwent an unbelievably rigorous final inspection before being passed to the Paint Shop.

## Topic Red

I have always held strong views on colour and specialist motor cars, and for this car I visualized something completely different. I had a mental picture of a deep, yet still bright red, with full metallic qualities. First enquiries suggested that this was impossible, but then Carr's Paints of Birmingham took up the challenge, and after several weeks of research produced what we had been looking for; a beautifully deep, rich red, giving an impression of great depth and a phosphorescent effect, which changes shade in different light. It was an original colour, created specially for the car, and we were particularly pleased when the manufacturers named it "Topic Red".

Meanwhile, the bodyshell was ready for its first coat, having been dipped in an acid wash, which removed all trace of grease. Then the dull, gleaming metal shell was lifted on to a gantry, and lowered into a huge bubbling cauldron of brown primer paint. Only four gallons of the five-and-a-half thousand in the tank actually stay on to the car but, before the process is complete, every fraction of an inch of the shell had received a true and thorough coating, which will make it proof against all weather conditions.

Next, the exterior panels were wiped clean and, after drying, the car was sprayed wet-on-wet with several coats of red primer. This was the first of the build-up coats of paint covering, spray and oven dry, rub down, spray again, wash off... until, several days later, she was ready for the first coat of our gorgeous colour.

To help with the line of our Interceptor we had decided to have the roof painted metallic

silver grey. This was done first, and then completely masked off whilst the coats of Topic Red were applied. The secret of the rock-hard, beautifully-polished surface, lies in the ability of Jensen's experienced painters to place thin coats of paint one after the other while still wet, before baking in a heated oven. Even in its unpolished state, the colouring looked magnificent.

## On the Fitting Line

After final paint work, the finished bodyshell took its place on the impressive fitting-up line, where it would spend no less than 100 hours being worked on by a team of fitters, each of whom specializes in a particular aspect of Jensen production.

The interior was underfelted, the engine compartment fire-proofed, and then the complexity of electrical system and fittings installed.

She moved along the line—foot pedals, steering column, bumpers, carpets, dashboard—and toward the end, glasswork in front, rear and side windows. Then, a car without a motor, she passed the last inspection point before going on to what the factory grandly calls "motorization".

## The Power Unit

It was at this stage that the car was first introduced to its engine. This magnificent Chrysler V8 unit, imported by Jensen's in its raw state, is sprayed and fitted, and really looked an imposing sight. On the *Topic* car the rocker covers were chromium-plated and when this 6 cwt. unit was loaded into the shell I really began to understand what gave the car a power output of 325 b.h.p. and a top speed of 140 m.p.h.! This



Right: The bodyshell is sprayed with four coats of primer before receiving its top coat, as in second picture. The bottom two pictures show stages of 'fitting-up' on the production line.

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Chrysler unit, with its automatic gearbox, must be one of the finest engines produced today.

The motorization took place some eight feet from the ground on a gantry. While the engine was being fitted, the rest of the mechanics were connected—petrol systems, suspension, hydraulics, and finally the road wheels—and, after further inspection, that wonderful moment came when the engine fired for the first time.

The car was driven 150 miles by experienced testers before final fitting up: acceleration, steering, smoothness, brakes—everything was treble-checked. It was driven through water troughs and pressure sprinklers to check weather-proofing and, having passed the critical eyes, the *Topic Red Interceptor* went back for its final fitting-out.

The beautifully-comfortable beige hide seats, which are, of course, fully-reclining, were fitted and matching headrests completed the driver's and front passenger's comfort.

Extras included were special air horns and power-assisted steering. A superb twin-speaker radio with electrical aerial, electric windows, electrically-heated rear window and Britax seat belts which match the upholstery, were all part of the standard equipment.

## A Little Extra



*Slot Stereo; an extra built into a console giving instant music by slotting in a tape cartridge.*

In fact, the only extra that we could find to fit into the saloon interior was Slot Stereo, a compact unit manufactured by University Recording Ltd., which is built on to the centre console, takes up no valuable space, but gives wonderful instant music by the simple expedient of slipping in a tape cartridge.

**Top:** The interior "cockpit" of the completed car—note the impressive instrument console in the centre. **Centre:** The final tightening-up of a wheel nut and the *Topic Jensen* is completed. **Bottom:** The impressive Chrysler power pack under the bonnet.

## Fourteen Inspections

At last, the *Topic Jensen* was ready for collection. A few minutes before the hand-over the car was still being polished and subjected to final-final inspection.

Checking my records, I found that during the ten weeks' building programme, the car had gone through no less than 14 inspections! At each and every one of these, any flaw in mechanics or finish was corrected before the car was released to the next stage. Care is one thing, but at the West Bromwich factory this is not enough, and only perfection or something very close to it is accepted by the devoted body of men who make these fine British cars.

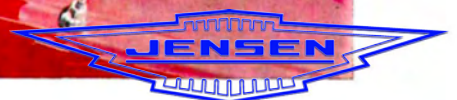
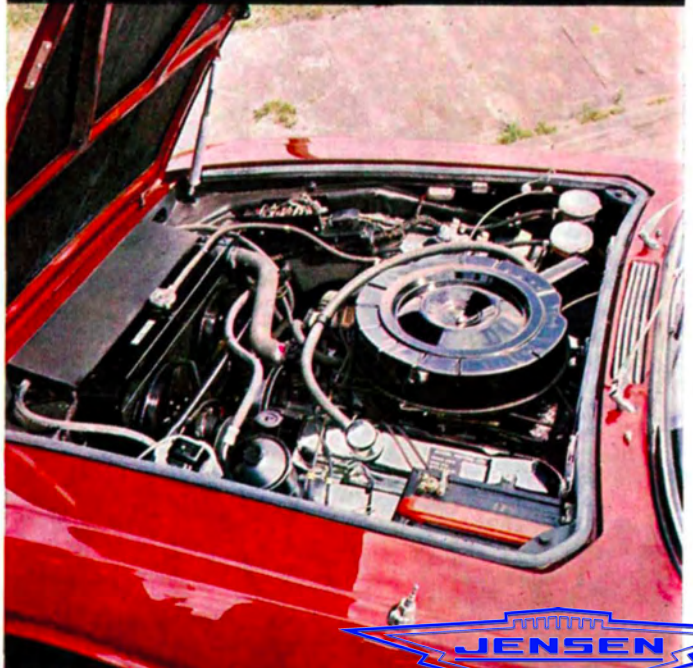
## People Who Care

The 400-strong team who build the Jensens—many of whom have been doing so since 1934—is headed by Managing Director Carl F. Duerr. An American, appointed by the Norcros Group earlier this year, Mr. Duerr is an inter-continental commuter with an impressive record on both sides of the Atlantic.

Marketing Director Dick Graves and Sales Manager Wyndham Powell were recruited from Rolls-Royce and Aston Martin respectively, and are selling Jensens in greater numbers than ever before. The man responsible for research and development of the Jensen is Director of Engineering Kevin Beattie, while Bill Silvester, the genial Works Manager, who joined the Company shortly after the war, puts his ideas into practice on the shop floor.

This dedicated team have created a unique car with a unique record, for in the 34 years since a Jensen first appeared on the road, there has been no report of a fatal accident involving any of their cars.

When I have finished running in the *Topic Interceptor*—I couldn't get TOP 1C registration plates, but settled for 1 JBB—she will undergo a rigorous road test. But that's another story, which will be told in a future edition.



# *See the exciting Jensen Interceptor and FF at*

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