Book Review – Jaguar XJR-9: Owner's Workshop Manual

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Title: Jaguar XJR-9: Owner's Workshop Manual

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Kieron Fennelly delves into a volume covering the history and development of Jaguar's iconic XJR-9, and the races in which it participated.

Jaguar won Le Mans not five, but seven times, but whereas the fifties victories of the C and D types have become the stuff of legend, Jaguar's subsequent victories in 1988 and 1990 and indeed its many wins in Group C over half a dozen seasons are somewhat forgotten. Now author and journalist Michael Cotton has set this to right. His compelling account describes how top class racer and team manager Tom Walkinshaw, recruited by the charismatic Jaguar CEO John Egan, graduated from successfully campaigning the XJS in touring car championships to building a competitive Group C racing car. Designed by Tony Southgate, in the space of three seasons, the XJR would end the decade-long Porsche domination of this premier division of sports car racing. The XJR series comprised spectacular cars with 6 and 7 litre V12 engines, the 1988 XJR-9 producing an impressive 750 naturally aspirated horsepower. Then the rules changed, limiting capacity to 3.5 litres. However, Jaguar Motorsport was not deflected: It built a turbocharged 3.5 again rated at 750 bhp, which rewarded the company with a seventh Le Mans win in 1990. After the Ford takeover of Jaguar, racing activities were wound down, yet privately-run XJRs continued to do well for another three seasons. In 1991, a one make series, the Jaguar Intercontinental Challenge, featured a limited edition XJR-15, an extraordinarily handsome Peter Stevens-styled road car that Walkinshaw hoped to market and cash in on Jaguar's Le Mans success. However, as the author explains, Jaguar already had its own supercar, the XJ 220 in the wings so in the end a mere 53 XJR-15s were built. A fascinating footnote is that in 1997 when Walkinshaw undertook to prepare a Le Mans competitor for Mazda, he used the monocoque originally designed more than a decade earlier for the XJRs.

Despite Jaguar's distinctly limited budgets, the carbon fibre-bodied Jaguar XJR racers were

well engineered and built. Win Percy's dramatic accident on the Mulsanne straight in 1987, recalled graphically by the driver himself on page 65, saw the car take off and flip through the air at 200 mph after a tyre burst and blew off part of the rear bodywork. It finally came to rest almost half a mile further on yet the carbon tub remained intact and Percy emerged shaken, but unscathed from the wreck.

VERDICT

The book recounts the historical background, describes the races over the seasons during which these Jaguars were active and profiles the drivers; indeed the author himself reported on many of these races at the time as an independent motorsport correspondent. Final chapters dealing with build and technical development of the XJRs themselves are supported by the excellent photography from former *Jaguar World* editor Paul Skilleter. This is a timely and authoritative work on a slightly neglected area of British motorsport history.