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AUTO AGE

THE CAR-OWNER'S COMPLETE MAGAZINE

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ROAD TESTS:

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ROVER 75 • MORRIS MINOR • AUSTIN A40



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AUTO AGE

THE CAR-OWNER'S COMPLETE MAGAZINE

VOL. 1, NO. 2
April, 1953

Martin Goodman—Publisher

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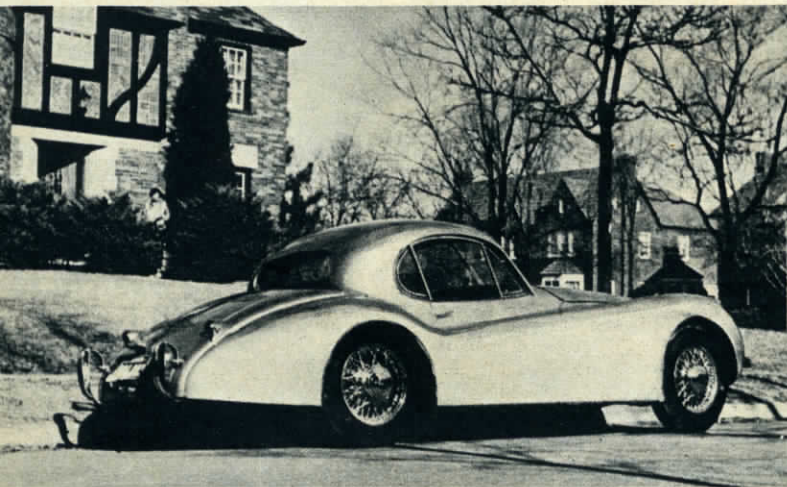
a joe wherry road test

JHW
JOSEPH H. WHERRY

Jaguar

XK 120

SPORTSMAN'S DELIGHT



Jerry Hardesty's hardtop coupe. Wire wheels are optional at extra cost, but dress up the car nicely, especially with skirts removed.

It was a "Chocolate Sundae" Jag for AUTO AGE's test expert, as he put both models of this super sportster through the mill



TAKE a *chocolate sundae* with a wheelbase of 102 inches, a power packed 8.0:1-compression twin-overhead-cam engine with a seven-bearing crankshaft of 2 3/4-inch diameter. Add the sort of roadability that went underground in the USA with the passing of the last Mercers and Stutz Bearcats. Mix all these mechanical factors, garnish well with the love of motoring simply for the pleasures derived, baste with the built-in virtue of the safety of the torsional suspension, and you too can go on a *Jag*.

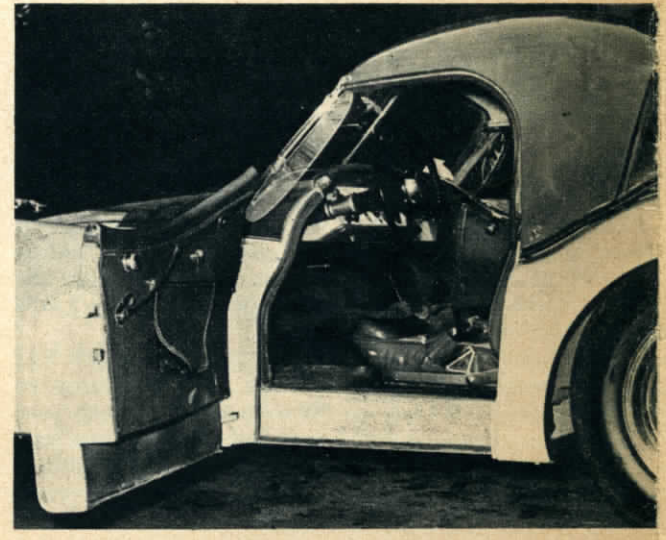
When Art Feuerbacher of Clayrich Motors, foreign car dealers in staid St. Louis, offered me the weekend use of his "Chocolate Sundae" XK 120 following Thanksgiving, I revved at the prospects. And because time comes fairly close to standing still when you shove your foot forward in a Jaguar sports car it seemed wise to undergo a bit of a refresher under the tutelage of Jerry Hardesty, a young building contractor who dashes around in one of the equally potent fixed-head coupe jobs.

So after my bacon eggs, etc. early Thanksgiving AM, I jumped in the Morris Minor which I'd been checking for a week and drove over to fashionable Webster Groves and slinked up to the curb behind Jerry's metallic blue Jag coupe. New wire wheels had been added since I last saw the blue streak; the better brake cooling thus afforded should increase the already superior braking power.

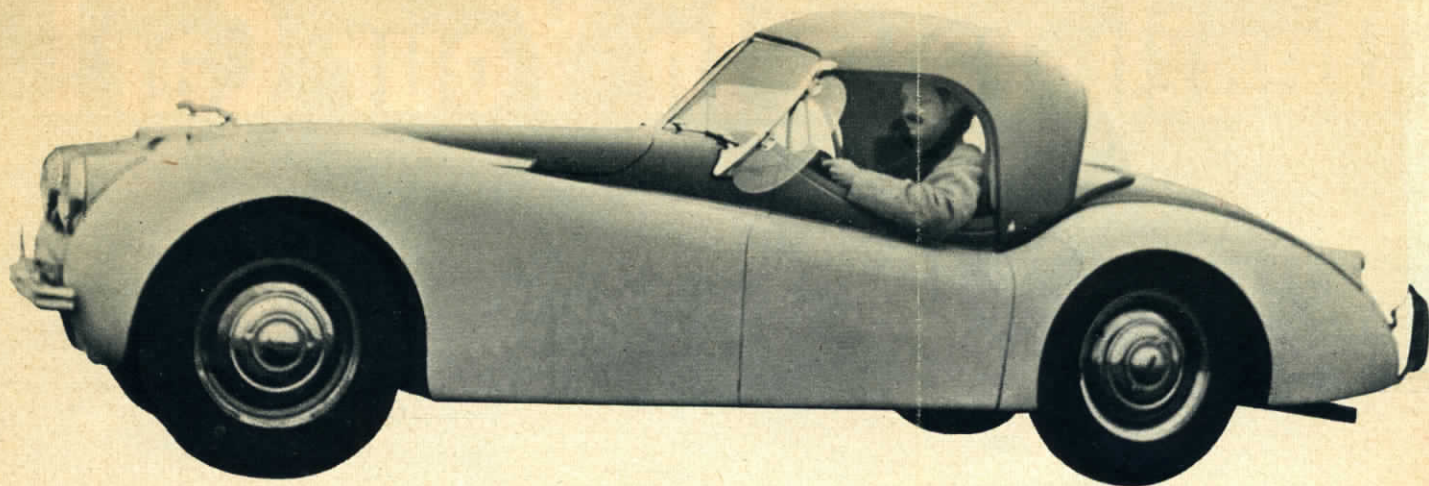
We took off (and I mean just that) for the open roads. We stopped shortly and lead-footed Jerry suggested we



Young Joe, the writer's son, inspects the rear boot of Art Feuerbacher's "Chocolate Sundae." The kids are really sold on the Jag.



An interior shot of the "Sundae" shows the four-speed floor shift, excellent hand brake, safety belts and adjustable steering wheel.



change sides. We did. Jerry's Jag has about 10,000 miles, hard ones, behind it. One tune-up and a new set of spark plugs is the only maintenance so far. Smooth as silk, the six-cylinder 160-horse engine was indicating nearly 4,500 rpm's before I realized just what speed we were traveling. In sports cars one should keep the tachometer in mind; an accurate gauge of performance, a steady needle means proper timing, and the manifold pressure gauge at the bottom of the tach clock is a further indication of good engine condition. The Jag's engine turns out 1,000 rpm's for every 22.7 miles per hour when on the smooth and level and with negligible slippage.

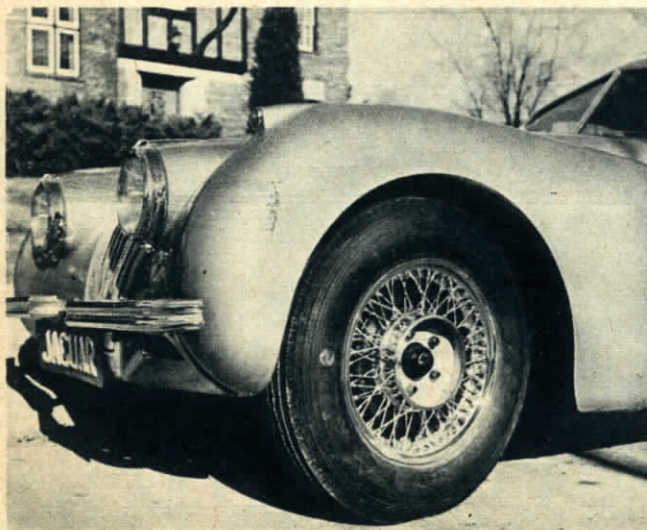
Heading West on Highway 40 we let 'er out, as traffic simply wasn't and the road was dry and nice. You get the feel of a Jag in a hurry. Sitting so low that you could touch the ground with the door open, and with a suspension that is solid, there is little feeling of speed. Long torsion bars with transverse wishbones together with Newton telescopic hydraulic shocks make a firm, virtually non-swaying front end; very long, silico-manganese steel elliptical rear springs with firm Girling shocks and the slightly aft and low center of gravity allows a Jag to negotiate what is ordinarily a 50-mph highway at speeds that will easily average nearly 90.

Around town, or whenever travelling below 40 mph, the Jag is actually a bit on the rough side, but leather-upholstered bucket seats compensate, and the extreme leg room and adjustments allow for comfort whether the

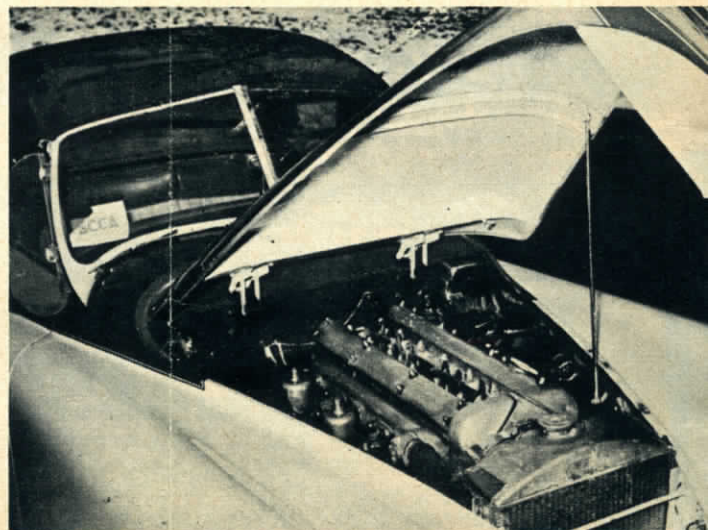
driver be midget or giant. The large Bluemel steering wheel is adjustable three inches forward or back simply by pulling or pushing. All these features, most of which are standard on foreign sports cars, make the Jaguar, in my opinion, a comfortable car.

Look at it this way: the passenger cars to which we are accustomed are designed to give a baby buggy ride over all kinds of roads. Most American cars do this—even the current crop of Detroit jobs fitted with sports-type, European-designed bodies. But they're not made for cornering at high speeds. Take a new convertible and slam around a corner, and what happens? That's right: the car leans and screams and the occupants have to hang on for dear life to keep from bunching together on the side of the car that's on the outside of the curve. You don't get this leaning and displacing in a well-designed sports car. Just enough shock absorber action to dampen, not eliminate, the more serious bumps at low speeds is present. This with high ratio steering makes the Jag as maneuverable a car as you're likely to find. For competition the steering ratio could be increased (and often is), but the outstanding handling qualities are making many people favor sports cars as an everyday, town and country utility and business car.

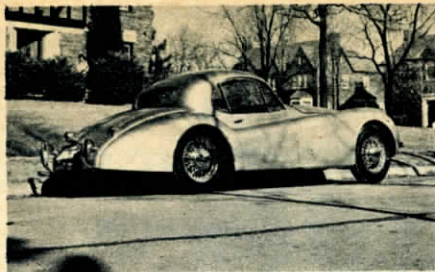
These mechanical thoughts formed the gist of our conversation as we headed West. I wanted to make acceleration tests, and Jerry okayed the deal as he'd never made thorough checks; so we pulled (*Continued on page 76*)



Here's a close-up of the neat wire wheels on the fixed head coupe. They're not the racing knock-off type, but bolt on conventionally.



The SCCA-registered "Sundae" opens up to show its innards. Notice the twin carbs, and the specially polished aluminum on the bonnet.



JAGUAR XK20— SPORTSMAN'S DELIGHT

Continued from page 11

down from 90 mph as easily and as quickly as I'd stop my Nash. No strain, no tire squeal; just a firm but quick stop. Generally conceded among St. Louis regional members of the SCCA to be a hot though strictly stock Jag, this car's speedometer error averages slightly less than three per cent. Through the gears from 1st and into 3rd I got an initial reading of 9.4 seconds, from zero to 60. The Jag will do better so I did some practice shifting to get full peak before shifting up. Actually upshifting is best done just a split second before gear peak is reached. After several experimental runs we put the stop watch into action again. I got just a shade under nine seconds. I was still proving my lack of familiarity with the Jag, so we made more runs. Finally I got the hang of it, clutching smoothed and I got a neat 8.5 seconds zero to 60 on three runs with no more than a split tenth of a second variation.

Your legs practically parallel the floor in either the Jag XK120 sports or the coupe, adding to comfort but requiring shifting practice. Space does not permit separate reports on these two cars. Actually the coupe is rated approximately four miles per hour faster at top speed than is the open job. This is logically due to the increased drag of the open cockpit of the sports. Otherwise for all practical rating purposes, acceleration on two equally well-tuned cars will be so close as to obviate separate clockings. Later in the week when I had Feuerbacher's "Chocolate Sundae" in my own custody, the same acceleration reading, zero to 60, was obtained.

Specifically the fixed head coupe, as the Jaguar people have officially named it, differs only outwardly from the open Jag. A polished knotty walnut fascia panel (dash in American) dresses up the interior, and interior lighting just about completes the change. The hard-top model costs less than a hundred bucks more, but the wire wheels on the coupe I drove are an accessory available at an extra \$300, or thereabouts, for five. As to weight, the coupe weighs about 2,550 pounds to the XK's dry weight of 2,400. As might be assumed, the coupe is gaining in popularity, the Jaguar factory now producing more of the hard-top than of the open jewel.

A good heater is standard in the Coupe; this unit heats well, but the "demisters" don't quite handle the windshield frosting problem when the weather is cold. The wipers are electric, but often fail to return to the windshield base without coaxing when turning them off. Of course the coupe has the two large delivery S.U. carbs but the fuel tank holds a normal 15 gal-

lons (British; 18 gallons US) against the 14 gallons carried in the open XK sports. There's a reserve supply which flows after actuating by means of the dash control. This extra couple of gallons, like on the lovely Rover 75, will always pull you in. A 24-gallon tank can be installed optionally with a corresponding rear luggage compartment volume reduction. Strangely the XK sports can be fitted with a slightly larger 25-gallon special tank for competition. (British fluid measurements are converted to American by multiplying the former by 1.2.) Finally, the coupe features self-cancelling turn signals as standard equipment.

Certainly the extra hundred dollars is well spent with the added comfort and conveniences obtained on the fixed head coupe.

Jerry was feeling good after seeing the results of the acceleration runs, so we mutually decided to see what his blue Jag would do flat out. A nice straight-away, still no traffic, and a couple of lead-foots will try such things. Winding up fast, we were soon getting a clean 5,900 rpm's which we held for about 20 seconds. Steady as a brick, a good Jag at this speed feels better than a stock USA-built passenger at 90.

Now by computing the rpm's into miles per hour by multiplying the former engine revs by 22.7 per thousand, we get 133.93 miles an hour. Deducting a good three per cent for error gives a result of roughly 129 mph. At such speeds on even dry pavement there is some slippage and, therefore, we can logically reckon on about 124-127 miles per hour. Really moving!

We were on our way back to Thanksgiving dinners, so we agreed to try for that little stop pin on the tachometer. We made it and the tach needle pegged firmly at 6,000 rpm's. We were at this count for four-tenths of a mile when the water temperature needle started up toward 100 degrees Centigrade. The cooling system of the Jaguars can stand improvement. This coupe's radiator had alcohol, but before we had gone more than three miles at vastly reduced speed, she was beginning to boil. The sight of a gas station was welcome and the situation was rectified.

Back in Webster I thought of flash bulbs just after passing a drug store. The street was very narrow but the Jaguar factory's specified 31-foot turning circle proved correct. (I actually measured it later when testing the XK sports job.) Three hours fun in Hardesty's blue coupe netted more than 140 miles, partly over rough roads; included in the time was a good half-hour spent in fooling around in very tight

circles, acceleration runs, and the like.

The next Saturday I picked up Art's beautiful "Chocolate Sundae"—so tagged because of the unusual paint job, a rich cream color topped with chocolate brown with a pleasing strip of the aluminum hood polished down to the bare metal giving a tantalizing appearance similar to some silver-colored icing that once decorated my birthday cake about the time my Dad was a good Willys-Overland "Whippet" customer. Equipped with one of Bill Tritt's *Glasspar* Fiberglass tops and one side curtain (on the right side), this little car got a week-end workout. You honestly cannot appreciate a sports car until you drive one continuously for several days. This goes for any of the available makes just as surely as it applies to the Jag.

Saturday evening my whole family, Bettye and the two kids but minus the two dogs, piled in with the help of a shoe horn and we went grocery shopping. The luggage boot handled the week's food supply we always lay in, plus a generous amount of hunting equipment left there by the owner. In a pinch, and it was, one eight- or nine-year-old can sit on his imagination between the two individual front seats: our seven-year-old chunk of daughter sat on Mommy's lap. The short throw of the four-speed floor shift notwithstanding, the family demanded that we all go for a ride. We even brought home a Christmas tree later on during the evening; this was tied into the boot.

THE entire weekend of the 30th November was a chilly one; a bit of snow was on the ground. Picking up an engineer friend, Walt Keuhne, we crossed the Missouri River and headed for some more or less little traveled roads. There was no ice on the road, fortunately, for we wanted to try cornering, acceleration, and do a bit of photography with the Jag in motion.

We were off on the shoulder setting up Walt's Graphic when a Sheriff's car pulled up. We'd been hitting speeds between 90 and 100 mph in places and this, we thought, was it.

"Having trouble?" said the Deputy as he climbed out of his Ford and ambled over.

And then before either of us had time to answer, the Deputy eyed the "Chocolate Sundae" and asked "what in blazes" we had there. As we explained that this was a British Jaguar XK120 Sports car, etc., etc., the idea suddenly dawned that he'd be watching for us unless diplomacy was initiated. On my invitation the Deputy, whose name is being withheld out of deference to his official status, readily accepted a ride. He'd heard of these "awfully fast" cars, but never had he seen one. Walt was all set up near the end of a small bridge, so it was decided hurriedly that I'd take the Deputy for a 70-mph turn around the adjacent curve and Walt would catch us as we approached the straight.

Now this particular Deputy Sheriff is a husky fellow, and I have no doubts that he'd cheerfully wind his Ford patrol car to the limit should the need arise, but in his own words, he'd "never

made that corner any over 45; never felt a thing, just speed."

The Deputy departed after complimenting the Jag and the driver for being thoroughly safe; he knew "that we'd be careful" and didn't "see how anyone could hurt themselves in that little car." Actually the officer rode with me during several runs at various corners—he felt that law enforcement agencies could well use a car with the XK's abilities.

During the course of the afternoon we consistently got 8.5 seconds running from zero to 60. I hasten to add that some may dispute this reading, inasmuch as the Jag is generally credited with a flat 9.0 seconds from zero to 60 mph. However, such acceleration runs are neither impossible nor unusual; maybe it's just that the farther West one goes, the more lead-footed the native boys are and the writer hails from the Evergreen State of Washington where there are still enough wide open spaces to really let the lead out.

Zero to 90 mph checked at 15.6 seconds, and after cruising for a time back at 70 in 4th (top) gear I tried once shifting down to 3rd, hitting the gas, and shifting back to 4th when the hand hit 80 mph, then continuing to push it up. This gave 90 mph (from the original 70) in 5.4 seconds.

Friend Walt wanted to try his hand at the "Sundae" and by approaching a certain corner in 4th at 65, shifting down to 3rd just short of the corner, then throttling it through the corner without brakes, he was amazed to find himself coming out of the corner at 68 miles per hour. Walt drives a Kaiser, no ball of fire but a fairly good road car by domestic standards, and this was a 50 per corner, as far as his car was concerned. Suspension like this on a passenger car and that car will automatically become much safer; sway is decreased almost to the point of non-existence, and breaking is surer and quicker. The Jag Mark VII Salon is a prime example—weighing 3,300 pounds dry with a wheelbase of 120 inches, the Mark VII with its airfoam seats and similar suspension is comfortable to a degree seldom found, yet driver control is close to that in the XK and coupe.

Seldom realized is that most British auto builders have a guarantee that is, while not out of this world, certainly of greater scope than found domestically. With few exceptions, British cars, and Jags in particular, are rigidly-warranted mechanically (engine, chassis, gear box, differential, etc.) for a period of six months. It matters not what the total mileage may be, the Anglos will stand back of their merchandise.

Art Feuerbacher puts it this way: "Let's face it. We build good cars in this country, but most European cars are built with road handling under all conditions taking precedence over interior comfort. Yet by occasionally varying the seat adjustment fore and aft, and in height, too, you can change your position enough to eliminate some road weariness. Then there's the adjustable steering wheel which makes a change in seating position practicable."

Feuerbacher, who admittedly drives

and sells foreign cars because he simply likes good automobiles when he knows he could sell more American cars if he chose, tells of a trip some time ago during which he drove a Jag MK VII saloon out through Reno, over the Sierras into San Francisco, down to L.A. and back to St. Louis through Texas. Keeping an accurate point-to-point account mileagewise and with notes on speed averages, Art mentioned a run southwest of Reno for three hours during which he averaged a shade over 90 mph and got approximately 15 miles per gallon of gas. Furthermore, Art states the car was loaded with the vacation equipment of his wife and himself to a total weight of nearly 4,000 pounds. Performance like that leaves little room for argument.

I asked Art about reports I've heard about cylinder walls scoring. Having had that trouble on several customer's cars, Art experimented with engine operating temperatures and after installing thermostats that held the heat above 165 degrees F., no further trouble was encountered. The Chocolate Sundae (and I drove it for a total of 300 miles), has been tossed around, been in competition, racked up a total mileage of over 40,000 miles with most of that at average speeds far in excess of what the average car suffers. Common knowledge in local SCCA circles is the fact that the head has never been off the Chocolate Sundae's engine, nor has that engine had any more attention than tune-ups and new spark plugs at regular intervals plus new points and condensers. The reliability of the 12-volt electrical system seems to have a lot to do with long lasting ignition durability, and

only now, after all these hard miles, is the engine showing signs of "using oil excessively" in Art's words. Asking what the oil consumption was (because I had checked it twice while driving it), I was told that it now uses about one quart every 400 miles. 'Nuff said.

The dependability and strength of the XK engine proves not only the suitability of the six-in-line for many years to come, but records like the one established at Monthery, France, in October, 1950, when an XK averaged 107.46 mph over a 24-hour period is evidence of sound engineering as well—a tribute to overhead valves, dual cams, heavy bearings, etc., in this 3,442 c.c. engine that has a torque of nearly 195 pounds-foot at 2500 rpm's.

Another friend who had never driven any other than American passenger cars was induced by the writer to try his hand. "No car is more efficient at 60 mph on any road than my Olds is," I was told sarcastically. Half way through an 80 mph corner riding flat he asked to be allowed to drive. He drove. That was three weeks ago, and he's still talking about the experience—he loves it.

Sure, the Jag's not perfect; the designers could well redesign the door latches on the coupe's interior; also the headlight dimmer switch is stashed away in a far corner and is a bit hard to operate with the extreme toe of the shoe, and I'd like adjustable speed wipers, an ash tray, etc., in the XK, but you can't have everything. After all what's under the hood and on the road's important too, and the Jag shines there, for sure. Frankly, if you don't want to lose your automotive heart, never go on a Jag jag.

