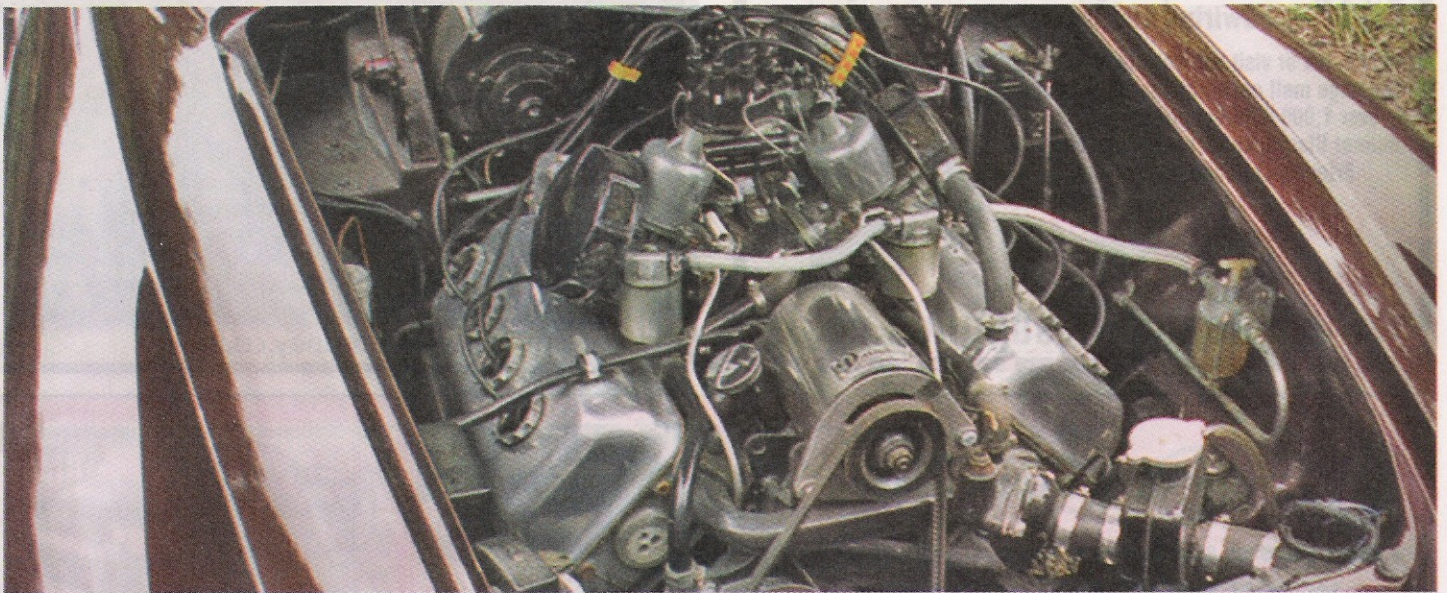


DAIMLER'S DIAMOND



By the time Jaguar bought the stately Daimler company it didn't have much to offer - apart from a magnificent V8. And as a new book on the SP250 Dart reveals, everybody wanted this engine - yet all it left was a trail of 'what ifs'...

THE ENGINE

The V8 engine was designed by the legendary Edward Turner, who made his name in British motorcycles with BSA, Ariel and Triumph, the latter where he designed the iconic Speed Twin unit. In many ways his 2.5-litre V8 was two Speed Twins combined as many parts were identical. The result was a compact light ohv unit just 2'6" long and at 190kg, a notable 60kg lighter than the compatible 2.4 XK twin cam. In 2.5-litre guise it developed 140bhp/155lbft of torque. The broadly similar larger 4.5-litre yielded 220bhp/283lbft although as Daimler's test bed only went up to 220bhp many believe the figure to be much higher - perhaps 270bhp!

THE FORCED JAGUAR MARRIAGE

Most pundits reckoned that Jaguar boss Sir William Lyons really bought Daimler for its large factories above all else but soon found himself with an excellent V8 engine going to waste. He regarded the SP250 'Dart' sports as a dead loss but thought that its sweet 2.5-litre V8 could bolster Mk2 sales and so slipped it into the range in 1962, bridging the gap between the 2.4 and 3.4 models - albeit at 3.8 prices.

Depending on what you believe, Lyons never really liked the V8 as it trod on the XK engine's toes and so it always took a back seat to his beloved straight six design. And yet when the unit was installed in a hefty Mk10, in 4.5-litre guise, it provided astonishing performance, fairly licking the E-type engine where up to 130mph was attained! And when the engineering shop fitted made an experimental V8 450...

But with Jaguar deep into developing its own V12 (the first Mk10-powered V12 ran in late '65), and one suspects a slice of pride at stake too, Lyons ignored this magnificent engine.

One could speculate whether Jaguar ever needed a V12 at all after sampling the V8. And remember, Jaguar became part of BMC in '66 and BLMC two years later.

Hindsight is a virtue of course but taking the argument further, wouldn't this engine had made a better fist of things in the Triumph Stag as well?

THE LOTUS LINK

The Elan +2 was launched in the summer of love but had been on the drawing board as far back as 1963, the same time Lotus head Colin Chapman was being wooed by Lyons, who perhaps saw the younger man as his heir apparent. Certainly a mooted merger of the companies was rumoured.

On a factory visit, in May '63, Chapman and his deputies saw the revamped SP250 ('252') but what really impressed them was that V8 engine, which would make a fine unit for the new upmarket Elan. However due to a variety of factors (*which included Chapman's sole focus on just the racing side of Lotus and Ford also in the frame for any take-over-ed*) the merger fell through and it took another 33 years before we saw a Lotus V8...

One can only dream about what that smooth lightweight 140bhp V8 would have done to the Elan - or the racier mid-engine Europa for that matter!

THE CRESTA RUN

Not so much a tie up with Vauxhall for that engine but more Daimler wanting to turn the swanky PA into a smaller, trendier Conquest replacement, the

BN250 project was a hurried attempt at the tail end of the 1950s to make the old fluted grille fashionable. The first styling design was more influenced on Ford's Mk2 Zodiac but with engine designer Edward Turner being a Cadillac fan, he tuned to Luton not Dagenham to give a lead.

Daimler is said to have purchased a Cresta, gave it a more lavish interior and shoehorned its V8 in, which apparently made the staid PA go like a rocket! Whether Daimler ever intended to officially approach Vauxhall is in question but perhaps the Cresta may have provided the ideal platform to make a Jag rival before the Lyons take over.

Interestingly, Vauxhall wanted its flagship range to be V8 powered for many years and owner General Motors had plenty of them. Yet the ohc slant four engine, introduced in 1967 for the all new FD Victor, was half a UK-designed V8!

V8-powered Ventoras tore up their rear axles - and in the wake of the 1970s fuel crisis, the idea of a V8 Vauxhall was similarly torn up although the idea did manifest itself into a racing Ventora by 1974 and then a Firenze coupe a year later.

THE REAL MGB V8?

Stuff the Rover V8-powered MGBs, the first one came years earlier for an assault on Le Mans. Ricardo, still today a leading consultant and specialist, slotted in the Daimler 2.5 V8 into an MGB Roadster as early as 1964 and was soon achieving over 200bhp with the car hitting 60mph in under four seconds and almost touch 150mph! MG knew about the cars and even supplied the shells. The potential was certainly there but it all came to nothing. Why the project was dropped so abruptly is open to debate, but obviously the MGC was in the wings. Interestingly, in standard tune the 140bhp V8 virtually matched the old 3-litre lorry lump and was tones lighter up front too. In fact, it would have made an equally good job as the Rover unit that eventually found its way under the bonnet. What a cracking road car a Daimler MGB would have made and the V8 was also tried in a Sunbeam Alpine, forerunner to the Tiger.

The book, *Daimler V8250*, by Brian Long is the second revised edition of this excellent in depth account of both the car and the company. Superbly researched with great period grainy pics, it's easy to read plus there's comprehensive detailings of the car's history, specification, prices and advice to aid any restoration project. Published by Veloce (www.velocebooks.com) it costs a worthy £34.99.