

Jensen Interceptor



SAN FRANCISCO: The second series, Italian bodied, Jensen Interceptor was introduced in late 1966 at the London Motor Show. While Jensen's primary business has been pressing body panels and building bodies for a number of mainstream manufacturers, the British firm had also regularly produced its own line of handsome, sporting tourers. Prior to WWII, Jensen's were built on both American Ford and Nash chassis. After the war the firm introduced the first series Interceptor, a six cylinder, four place, aluminum-bodied car built with the latest Austin of England mechanicals.

By 1966, Jensen had replaced the Austin six with an American Chrysler V8 and had shrunk the car to fit an unusual fastback coupe called the CV8. The firm was ready to rebodily the out-of-date and rather ungainly looking CV8 to make way for a sleek new Interceptor. A CV8 was shipped to Italian coachbuilder Vignale and rebodied as the new Interceptor prototype. It was so well received that the car went directly into production.

Series 1 Interceptors (1967 - 1969) were never commercially imported to North America. Most were built with right-hand-drive and, while looking much the same as the later cars, had a number of unique and non-Department of Transportation (DOT) approved pieces and had no US emissions equipment. They continued to retain the old Austin steering and front suspension but were powered by 383 cubes of Chrysler "wedge" engine. A few were even built with 4-speed gearboxes.

The Series 2 models, imported from 1970, were built to US spec from the start. They featured updated brakes and suspension from Alfred & Adler who also supplied similar components for the Masarati Mexico, Monteverdi Hispeed and the Iso Rivoleta. These massive and powerful beauties garnered rave reviews and lots of interest.

While the Series 3 Interceptor, brought out in mid 1971 featuring a massive 440 cu.in. Chrysler engine and other internal improvements, it suffered as the years went on, and the ever-more-stringent US smog and safety laws drained the "perform" out of the word performance. The Interceptor convertible hit the showrooms in 1974 to the delight of both open air enthusiasts and folks who loved the Jensen but loathed the "fishbowl" rear window treatment on the hardtop. Here

was a car that compared favorably with an Aston Martin at a much more reasonable price. They built only 503 of these between 1974 - 76.

There were other very limited production versions of the Interceptor as well, like the Coupe, that featured the convertible's trunk lid instead of the fishbowl window and a shorter top that used a Jag XJ6 rear window and charcoal tinted glass "Targa" band just aft of the doors. Jensen built only 22 of these. Then there's the SP "Six-Pack" model with three two barrel Holley carbs, and let's not forget the never commercially imported Interceptor FF, the first production car featuring full-time four-wheel-drive and anti-lock brakes!

The Jensen Interceptor is an amazing car for the money. This Italian bodied, British-built exotic provides much of the "feel" and style of a British Aston Martin Volante, German Bitter or an Italian Ferrari 400 coupe at a fraction of the price. Though expensive to restore, a clean and very enjoyable example could probably be purchased for the price of a similar condition vintage Camaro.

It's a man's car - big, brawny and entertaining to drive, more comparable to American sport luxury touring cars like the first series Buick Riviera or the supercharged Studebaker Avanti, but with the leather seating and fine detailing that we've come to expect from a proper British touring sedan. It is a truly low production car that will always be quite rare, especially the convertibles. And best of all, it uses standard Mopar running gear. Kind of like a Jaguar with American grunt