

# The Jensen Interceptor: Chrysler-Powered British Luxury

Allan and Richard Jensen's auto business was started before World War II, which interrupted production until 1950, when their first Interceptor was made. At the time, they made Austin bodies under contract, and the first Interceptor resembled an Austin A40 (the Jensens built bodies for a string of cars that included the Volvo P1800, [Sunbeam Tiger](#), and Austin-Healey.) The first Interceptor used a 4 liter Austin in-line six, and was produced in small numbers for over a decade. Jensen also used [Nash Twin-Ignition Eight](#) engines for a time, and the 1962 C-V8 used a [Chrysler 361](#) B-block engine. A number of these early Jensens made their way to the US before and after World War II.

The next version kept the basic C-V8 chassis, but changed styling. Initially, an in-house convertible design was planned, but chief engineer Kevin Beattie argued for an Italian flavor. Proposals were taken from different design houses, with Carozzeria Touring winning out with a fastback coupe incorporating a rounded tail, but that house was unable to finalize the design. Vignale, instead, provided prototype and initial production bodies, rendered in steel, on CV-8 chassis sent to them by Jensen. Turnaround was quick - about four months - so the new Interceptors could be shown in London in October 1966. Jensen later used the jigs and tools, which were sent by Vignale to the West Bromwich factory.

The body had two doors, a low beltline, and fishbowl rear glass in a handsome 2+2 design. Power initially came from a [383 cubic inch \(6.2-liter\) Mopar V-8](#), with an easy 325 horsepower and tire-lighting torque, pushing a Chrysler three-speed [Torqueflite automatic](#). A zero to sixty sprint took a mere 7.1 seconds - an excellent time for 1966 - with a 135 mph top speed. The Birmingham factory produced about 600 of these Interceptors per year.

Jensen offered a four-wheel-drive version of the Interceptor dubbed the FF; the four wheel drive system was developed by tractor manufacturer Harry Ferguson, making the FF one of the most technically sophisticated cars of its era, especially since it was one of the first production cars to have mechanical anti-lock brakes. The car boasted Girling disc brakes all around, when four-wheel disc brakes were a rarity.

The Interceptor was big for a European car, though small by American standards (shorter than a Camaro), with an overall length of 188 inches, about five inches shorter than a late-model Camaro. Front seat passengers were enveloped in splendor with leather-covered bucket seats, wood trim, and wool carpeting, but the rear seats were confined. The huge rear hatch had substantial luggage space. A convertible version appeared 1974.

In addition to the 360, some 440-powered Interceptors were made, and the Hemi was under experimentation (the cost to bring the suspension up to speed, not to mention to import the practically handmade 426 Hemi, would have been prohibitive).

Jensen not only made a 440 Interceptor, they also made a 440 Six Pack interceptor, the extremely rare Interceptor SP. This may have been offered in both two wheel drive and FF form, but SP FFs are not believed to have made it out of single digits.

The British ITC TV series "Return of the Saint" used an Interceptor as Simon Templar's car, with the traditional "ST 1" license plate. Jensen-built cars seem to have been a tradition in the Saint TV series, with Roger Moore driving a Jensen-built Volvo P1800 in the original.

The Jensens understood that they would need to raise production to be profitable, and hired Carl Doerr in 1968, not long after the new Interceptor arrived, to do that. He did double production, but also arranged for the sale of Jensen to merchant bankers, who in turn sold it two years later, in 1970, to San Francisco Jaguar/Land Rover/Bentley dealer Kjell Qvale (that's Norwegian, pronounced "shell kuh-volley", and his British Motors is very much in business today). Qvale hired Alfred Vickers to be managing director, and added Donald Healey to the board. The Jensen Healey, a new two-seat roadster with GM/Vauxhall four-cylinders in the prototype and an aluminum 2.0 liter Lotus 907 engine in production models, was the result (that engine, used in the Lotus Elite, was later stroked to 2.2 liters and turbocharged for the Lotus Esprit). When Healey left in 1976, the Jensen-Healey became the GT.

The GT had many luxury touches, including a full burl wood dash and factory installed air standard in US models. The sticker price of \$11,000 was very high for the day, when a Valiant sold for under \$3,000. The GT was rushed into production, according to the Jensen-Healey Preservation Society web site, so that labor costs were higher. While Jack Nerad blamed the Chrysler V8s' fuel consumption for Jensen's failure, the Preservation Society wrote, "Wildcat strikes, continual parts shortages, inflation, a shakey financial footing, and bad economic conditions all contribute to closing the doors of Jensen Motors in May, 1976."

Certainly, the Jensen-Healey's low sales meant high losses on the medium-priced sports car. The Jensen Healey and GT never sold in the kind of volume needed to be profitable (the GT only sold 509 copies), probably because they were priced relatively high for the level of performance, and were somewhat too large for the powerplant.

Three parts of the business survived liquidation, including the Parts and Service Division that was later reorganized with new management and new financing, but keeping the original tooling for the Interceptor. By 1986, Parts and Service has been reorganized as Jensen Cars Limited. They even made a very small production Mark IV series, using the Chrysler 360, in 1987, eleven years after the last 440-powered Series III was built. Jensen came out with new models in the late 1990s but appears to have submerged once again.