

first came across the name Jensen as a child when I was given a model of an FF. The beautiful lines of the car with its sleek, ultra-modern shape and huge engine captivated my attention but I knew little else about the real car behind the yellow Dinky toy.

In fact the FF was a specially upgraded version of the Interceptor model with ground-breaking four-wheel drive, years ahead of the Audi Quattro and even anti-lock brakes.

But Jensen's days were numbered in the 1970s. Despite a heritage stretching back to the 1930s, when the company was founded by Richard and Alan Jensen, it failed in 1976.

Spiralling oil prices were one reason for its demise, the huge 7.2 litre Chrysler engine gulping obscene amounts of fuel. But there were also quality issues at the plant and, at a time when rivals such as Rolls Royce and Aston Martin were also struggling, Jensen bit the dust.

Various attempts have been made over the years to revive the great marque but now the cars are once again hitting the roads under the guise of Jensen International Automotive, and with the cream of Oxfordshire engineering excellence at their core.

That and a six-figure cash injection from a team of investors, including Carphone Warehouse founder Charles Dunstone, have brought the dream to life once more and buyers are again queuing up to indulge in a slice of motoring history that can compete with the best high performance cars on the road today.

The Jensen Interceptor R, as the new incarnation is known, is hand-built by Gama Cars in Banbury, with the coachwork carried out by Lim Historics in Brackley. Sales are organised through the Jensen head office in Thame with managing director Tony Banham, formerly of Nord Engineering in Abingdon, in charge.

It is not "new" car as such, as the team take an original car and completely strip it down to the shell before rebuilding it with a modern Chevrolet Corvette engine, automatic gearbox, brakes, suspension, interior and even wheels.

The process takes five months, with the new owner consulted at every stage, and each car is unique, produced to customer specification.

Marketing manager Steve Bannister said: "Jensen effectively disappeared and the remaining cars went through a phase of being worthless before rocketing in value again.

"I was involved in the restoration business and it occurred to us that people wanted one of these cars so much, they were prepared to put up with the nuances of a 40-year-old vehicle."

The original car had design faults, not least of which was that vast lump of an engine which overheated and occasionally ignited because the bonnet wasn't large enough to accommodate it.

Despite their Italian design and British build (some might say because of it), the cars were unreliable and inefficient.

But the Gama Cars team were able to apply modern technology to cure the faults and produce a car with a classic heritage but with reliability built in.

Mr Bannister added: "We went back to the drawing board and spent eight months working on quality issues before getting to work on the car which evolved until we launched it in December."

The 'R' insignia sums up that process — the car has been redesigned, re-engineered and



In the Banbury workshop

Photographs  
Mark Hemsworth

# INTERCEPTOR IS RECONCEIVED

Andrew Smith goes back to the future as he witnesses the rebirth of a motoring legend

re-born: "The design brief was simple. The car had to look like an Interceptor but it had to corner well and stop quickly," said Mr Bannister.

The 'R' will now accelerate from 0-60mph in under five seconds and reach 160mph, thanks to the 6.2 litre engine. But it is also capable of 25 miles to the gallon, all of which puts it on a par with a modern supercar.

About 15 cars a year will be made, making it a real exclusive car and the new owner will pay from £105,000, depending on specification, which again puts it in the supercar class.

But Mr Bannister reckons there is no shortage of demand with inquiries coming from across Europe since the car was launched, and the Gama Cars team has already doubled to six.

In this age of economic austerity, some may wonder how such luxuries can be afforded but there will always be those willing to pay for something that sets them apart, and gives the exclusivity they crave. And there is no doubt Jensen delivers in bucket loads.

■ Contact: 08459 519 5265.  
Web: [www.jensen-sales.com](http://www.jensen-sales.com)

## The test drive . . .

A sense of awe creeps up on you as you slide behind the wheel of the Interceptor. Breathe deeply and you can smell the old car underneath it all. But blip the throttle and the car shows its modern trappings, epitomised by the throaty growl from that big Chevy engine.

But this is no uncontrollable beast. The car handled like a big pussy cat in the heavy Banbury traffic, until I finally found a stretch of road to put my foot down.

Suddenly the automatic gearbox changed down, the growl changed into a roar and the Jensen leapt forward.

I gripped the large steering wheel as it surged forward but confronted by more traffic, the brake brought it smoothly to a sensible speed.

Yes, you could have more opulent cars for the money. A Bentley will cosset you more, while an Aston Martin will offer state-of-the-art engineering and performance.

But nothing looks or sounds like a Jensen, and you just cannot put a price on that.