

Moseley: The birthplace of Jensen Motors

The name Jensen has long been associated with luxury motoring and has been a favourite of the rich and famous. There is an impressive list of prominent people who have owned Jensen cars, including some local to the West Midlands, such as John Bonham, the Led Zeppelin drummer, and Robert Plant, as well as big names like Roger Moore, Henry Cooper, Eric Morecambe, and Ernie Wise.

It was only very recently that the link between Jensen Motors and Moseley came to light when a local resident contacted the Moseley Society to inform us that the two Jensen brothers, Frank Alan (known as Alan) and Richard Arthur Jensen, who created Jensen Motors, once lived in Moseley. Furthermore, while working for Birmingham Town & Country as a Planning Officer, he witnessed one lunchtime the filming of Cliff Richard's film *'Take Me High'* in 1973.

Researching the Birmingham City Directory, Kelly's Directory and the 1911 and 1921 censuses, the Moseley Society History Group confirmed the Jensen brothers had indeed lived in Moseley.

Their father, Frank Arthur Jensen, who was of Danish descent, married Mary Ann Craven in 1902. After their marriage, Frank and Mary moved from Grimsby to their first home at 49 Chestnut Road Moseley.

By 1906, when Alan was born, Frank and Mary had moved nearby to 44, Sandford Road where Richard and his sister Christine were also born in 1909 and 1913 respectively. In need of a larger home, the family moved to a new house just around the corner at 14, Bloomfield Road, Moseley in 1915.

On leaving school, Alan became an apprentice with Serck Radiators and Richard an apprentice with Wolseley Motors. Still living in Bloomfield Road in 1928, the brothers decided to create their own specially-bodied car. With the chassis of an Austin Seven Chummy bought for them by their father, Alan and Frank built a sleek low sports-style body, referred to as 'Jensen Number One'.

Their design caught the attention of Arthur Wilde, the Chief Engineer of the Standard Motor Company. This resulted in a meeting with the brothers and the outcome was 'Jensen Special Number Two'. Built under Wilde's aegis the first Standard Avon open two-seaters were produced from 1929. Two more cars were designed for Avon before Alan moved with his brother Richard to Edgbaston Garage Limited under the chairmanship of J.A. Patrick in 1931.



**Jensen's first Avon Special
(Wikipedia)**

The brothers set to work on reorganising the entire garage, creating a small coach-building company department that made stylish bodies for the new Wolseley Hornet and Hornet Special chassis. The business was renamed Patrick Jensen Motors Ltd. Joe Patrick was not entirely happy with the name and it eventually led to the Jensen brothers leaving the company after an extraordinary meeting with him.

Following this walkout, Alan and Richard's next-door neighbour introduced them to George Mason, whose father owned an interest in W. J. Smith & Sons, a coach-building firm based in Carters Green, West Bromwich. Assuming the positions of joint Managing Directors, the brothers went about the reorganisation of the business, setting up a small car-building department within the factory. Following the death of William Smith in 1934, the firm became 'Jensen Motors Ltd' building sports bodies for other major manufacturers, emblazoned with the Jensen badge. The 1934 Ford Motor Show was a turning point for the company when their specially built sports car built on a Ford V8 chassis designed for Clark Gable was on display. The company went from strength to strength.

Film Star Orders Car from West Bromwich

CLARK GABLE wanted a new car. So he got an American chassis, and sent it to West Bromwich to be fitted with a Jensen sports body. The car left the works there to-day to be taken to the famous film star in Hollywood.

Before Clark Gable gets an opportunity to climb up into the driving seat, the car will have travelled 11,000 miles by road, rail and sea.

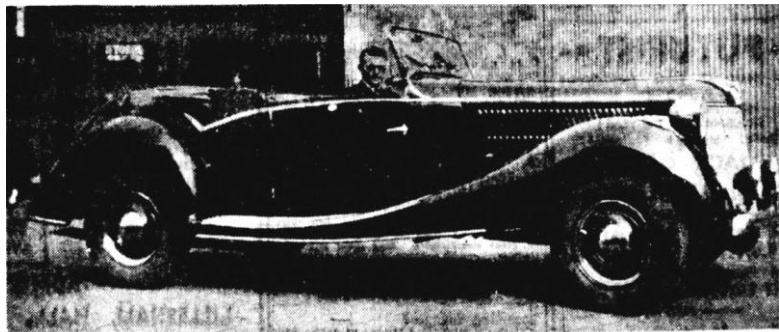
Jensen Motors, Ltd., of West Bromwich, has sent out three other cars to Hollywood. Who they are for is at present a secret.

PIG SKIN UPHOLSTERY.

Clark Gable's latest automobile acquisition is on a Ford V8 chassis, which the West Bromwich firm have lowered several inches. Instead of standard shock absorbers, they have fitted a system which is adjustable from the driver's seat.

Two levers also control the front and back springs independent of each other. The body is panelled in aluminium, it is coloured black, has pig-skin leather upholstery and Dunlopillo rubber front cushions.

A Jensen's Motor Company Ltd. advert appearing in *Britannia and Eve* on 1st November 1937



Clark Gable in his Jensen motor.
Evening Despatch on 29th September 1936

In 1936 Jensen's first car, the "White Lady" appeared, and three years later the company's first commercial vehicle, the Jensen lightweight truck was launched.

A POWERFUL PERSONALITY

3½ litre

2½ litre

HERE you have motoring with a piquant satisfying flavour, harnessing the thrill of speed and balanced power to the luxuries of perfect comfort and safety.

Silent as a wraith even at very high touring speeds, docile in heavy traffic, thoughtful as to fuel consumption, the "JENSEN" is a hand-made British motor-car which will delight and fascinate the most jaded motoring palate.

Literature and full details on request.

JENSEN MOTORS LTD · WEST BROMWICH · ENGLAND

H/A/A.1 Sole Distributors for London & Home Counties: BRITISH & COLONIAL MOTORS LTD., Long Acre & Upper St. Martin's Lane, W.C.2.

5½ LITRE MODELS WITH PRESELECTIVE OVERDRIVE
4½ Seater Continental Tourer, £645 4½ Seater 4-Gear Saloon, £695
Drop-head Coupé, £765
2½ LITRE MODELS
Same range of Body-styles from £495
Impeller-Turbo-Induction £45 extra.

In July 1938, Richard married Elizabeth Gertrude Dyson, a graduate of Newnham College, Cambridge, at Malvern Priory Church. She was the daughter of Arthur Dyson, the Managing Director of Horseley Bridge Engineering Company and of Thomas Piggott Ltd, Tipton. The couple had two children, Martin and Clare.

During the Second World War Jensen concentrated on the war effort and produced components for military vehicles including the turrets for tanks, and on the production of specialised ambulances and fire engines. After the war, Jensen launched a range of commercial vehicles including lorries, trucks, pantechnicons, and a few luxury coaches with the marque *JNSN*. The vehicles remained in production until 1956.

JNSN luxury coach.



JNSN lorry



The Old JML factory in Carters Green

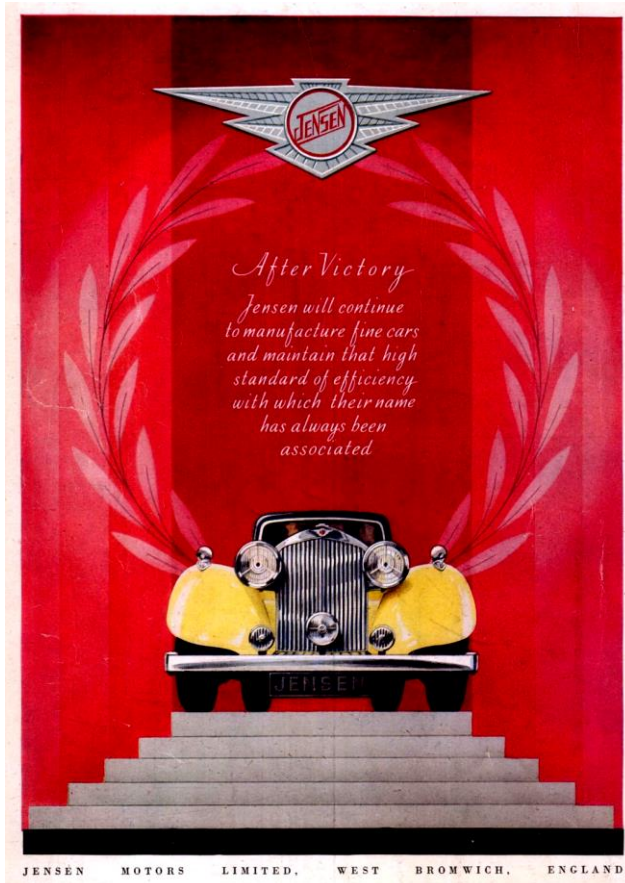


Another sideline the company introduced during the war was to offer a camouflaging service for cars within twenty-four hours at their Carters Green site in West Bromwich.

YOUR Car correctly camouflaged within
24 hours.
JENSEN MOTORS LTD.,
Carters Green, West Bromwich.

Birmingham Mail, 26th July 1940

The Jensen brothers were planning ahead for a post war revival to an exclusive market. Not long after the end of the war in May 1945, the advert below left appeared in *Country Life* on 11th August 1944 with the title 'After Victory' and on the right, 8th September the same year - notice the subtle inclusion of Marble Arch in the background, the 19th-century white marble-faced triumphal arch in London designed by John Nash as the state entrance to Buckingham Palace.



Two new manufacturing sites were established at Pensnett and Stoke on Trent to increase the build volume of the commercial vehicles. The Carters Green site continued to concentrate on car production, initially with a large luxury sporting saloon known as the PW (Post War) followed by the 4-litre saloon and convertible. Then in 1949 a cabriolet known as the 'Interceptor', this model was later also introduced in hardtop form. Production of this Interceptor model continued until 1957.



In the Reign of Elizabeth I
Drake's flagship
the Golden Hind
was the Interceptor
of the age . . .

To-day, in the coming
years of Elizabeth II, it
is our pride to present
this fine craftsmanship
designed and built car . .
the Twentieth Century
Interceptor.



*"The 4/5 seater 2-door
convertible, also available
as a 2-door saloon."*

THE JENSEN INTERCEPTOR



6 cylinder, 4 litre engine—over 100 m.p.h. 22/24 m.p.g.
Effortless high cruising speed 90 m.p.h. = 3,000 r.p.m.
10-30 m.p.h. in top gear—7 secs. 0-70 m.p.h.—17.8 secs.
Standing $\frac{1}{4}$ mile—19 secs. Exceptional visibility in all
directions. Ample accommodation for 5 passengers and luggage.

JENSEN MOTORS LTD. · WEST BROMWICH · ENGLAND
London Showrooms — 103 New Bond Street

An advert for the 'Interceptor' appearing in *The Sphere* on 20th June 1953

During this period the revolutionary 541 sports saloon was introduced. The bodywork of the 541 was mainly formed from reinforced glass fibre, an industry first for a mainstream vehicle manufacturer.

Jensen was now beginning to win contracts to build, assemble or finish vehicles for other companies. The Austin A40 Sports was an early example of this, and it was becoming obvious that the Carters Green facility was being rapidly outgrown, and a larger manufacturing facility was becoming necessary. One of the requirements for the new facility was for it to be in the West Bromwich locality, this was to ensure the skilled workforce, built up over the years, was retained. Some of these employees had joined W.J. Smiths in the 1920s and remained with Jensen until retirement.

A new factory was eventually acquired in Kelvin Way, West Bromwich during the mid-1950s. Initially, this took on the lucrative contract assembly work, or in some cases partial assembly, of vehicles for other manufacturers. These contracts were comparatively low-volume vehicles or

vehicle derivatives which would have disrupted production in the parent company's own high-volume environments. These included the Austin-Healey, the Austin Gypsy and the A95/A105 Westminster Estate car bodies.

Jensen was bought by Norcros Limited, an industrial holding company in June 1959. The Jensen car assembly moved to the Kelvin Way site in the early 1960s and continued with the 541S model. The last department to move from Carters Green was the Service Department.

Jensen car production through the early to mid-1960s remained very low with the 541S and its replacement the CV8 in 1963. The main revenue came from the contract assembly which included models from Volvo, BMC and the Rootes Group. The Jensen Brothers resigned from the company after a boardroom dispute regarding the replacement for the CV8 in 1966.

By 1971, Richard's health had deteriorated and he underwent major heart surgery. On a visit to see his family from his home in Malta, Richard fell ill and he died on 10th September 1977 at the National Heart Hospital, aged 68. Alan outlived his brother by another seventeen years. He died in January 1994, aged 87.

The company closed in 1976. On the Kelvin Way site, two associated companies were formed, namely Jensen Special Products and Jensen Parts and Service both remained there for a few years. The Carters Green site became an office facility which was renamed Jensen House). Jensen House is now the home of Trinity Housing Association Limited a charitable community benefit society.



The Kelvin Way Factory in its completed state in 1958

Researched and written by Edwina Rees, Moseley Society History Group

With thanks to the West Bromwich Local History Society for the history of the company posted on their website at: <https://www.westbromwichhistory.com/people-places/a-brief-history-of-jensen-motors-ltd-in-west-bromwich/>

The Jensen Motors Museum website at <https://www.jensenmuseum.org/monte-carlo-rally-1953-jensen-interceptors/>

The Jensen Commercial Vehicles website

<http://www.historywebsite.co.uk/Museum/Transport/Buses/Jensen.htm>