

## **Dick Harms: the Man and his Jaguars**

### **As told to Gary Cunningham**

Richard E. ("Dick") Harms was born in Chicago, Illinois in 1929 and moved to Royal Oak, Michigan when he was 16 years old. He graduated from Royal Oak High School in 1947.

Upon graduation, Dick went to work in the parts department at Royal Oak Buick and initially thought he would make a career in the retail automobile business. However, for reasons beyond his control,<sup>1</sup> Dick left the dealership and started a new career in the automotive tool and die trade, initially at Ford Motor Company, and then for another 40 years at General Motors.<sup>2</sup>

Dick's love affair with Jaguars started in May of 1952 when he noticed a new XK120 coupe parked outside the dealership owned by Lawrence Falvey on Woodward Avenue in Pontiac, Michigan.<sup>3</sup> It was Kensington Bronze in color with a biscuit interior and became a very important part of Dick's life. He lost his job, gained a wife, and entered his first auto race (in Janesville, Wisconsin), all because of that first Jaguar automobile!

The Falveys (Larry and Mary) moved their Jaguar dealership from Pontiac to a larger facility in Ferndale (also on Woodward Avenue) a couple of years later. Dick purchased a new XK140MC coupe from them in the fall of 1954 (it was a 1955 model). The car was light blue in color and had all the racing modifications available from both the factory in Coventry and Mr. Falvey's own personal touches. This car became Dick's most successful Jaguar on the race tracks of America, including Elkhart Lake (WI), Meadowdale (IL), Mid-Ohio, Mosport (Ontario), Saint Jovite (Quebec), Sebring (FL), Waterford Hills (MI), and Watkins Glen (NY). Dick raced his Jaguars for more than ten years from the late 1950s through the 1969 season and met the following drivers along the way: Mario Andretti, Briggs Cunningham, Mike Hawthorne, Stirling Moss, Joe

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<sup>1</sup> In 1952, Dick was fired from the Buick dealership in Royal Oak, Michigan for an egregious offense: He had the audacity to purchase a 1952 Jaguar XK120 coupe (in Kensington Bronze with a biscuit leather interior) and attempted to finance it through the credit union in which the owner of the Buick dealership sat on the board of directors.

<sup>2</sup> At GM, Dick met with Walter Ruther on several occasions as a member of the UAW. He also had the unique distinction for having driven a Jaguar to work the entire time he worked for GM.

<sup>3</sup> Dick loved to tell the story about the very first Jaguar he ever saw while traveling to Cleveland in the very early 1950s in his 1940 Buick Century (a "very hot" car). He was doing more than 80 mph down the old road to Cleveland when a Jaguar XK120 roadster came up behind him and then overtook him at more than 100 mph. At the next town, the Jaguar was stopped at a red light and Dick pulled up behind him and got out of his car to talk to the owner of the Jaguar. He was smitten on the spot! Although he continued on to Cleveland with his girlfriend to see a Peggy Lee concert, he decided then and there that he was going to buy a Jaguar.

Mulholland, Roger Penske and Tom Swindell. He had some very colorful stories to tell about each of them, but had the kindest words reserved for Mike Hawthorne (a “true gentleman”) and Roger Penske (a “gracious winner”).

Dick’s third Jaguar was a 1961 E-Type roadster (triple black) which he bought new from the Falveys. Although he raced it several times, he always did better in his XK140MC. In fact, Dick drove the XK140MC so often and hard, that as a result, the 1961 E-Type roadster became the only Jaguar owned by Dick that could be referred to as a “trailer queen.”

Dick bought a second E-Type (a 1963 roadster in French blue) as a used vehicle from Ted Wrobel. Ted Wrobel became more famous than his E-Type when he found his wife having an affair and ended up killing her, her lover and himself in a triple homicide. Soon after that, Dick sold the 1963 E-Type roadster to a guy in Chicago.

The fifth Jaguar to enter Dick’s life was a 1976 XJS in navy blue with a biscuit interior and Kent aluminum wheels (as well as a “beast” of a transmission). Although Dick never raced this car, he thought it was faster than any of the XKs or E-Types he had previously owned. And it was the only V12 car he ever owned.

Dick bought a second XK140MC in the late 70s or early 80s. This one was a used coupe from a guy in Lapeer, Michigan, who then retired to Florida. The car was in pretty bad shape and eventually he sold the car to Bill Welsh as a parts car in the late 1980s.<sup>4</sup>

In 1991, Dick was fortunate enough to acquire the last of five replica XKSS cars produced under a license from Jaguar by LR Roadster in Surrey, England (north of Coventry a few miles). Dick purchased the car through Brian Donovan (a broker out of Massachusetts), who saved Dick about \$9,000 in VAT on the car by bringing it into the states in pieces and then reassembling and painting the car in Massachusetts.

In 2012, a young lady (Kate Credbaum) at the church Dick attended in Clarkston, gave him some new advertising materials about the F-Type (she was working for an outside advertising company for Jaguar in California at the time). Then in August of 2013, Ian Callum (the head designer for Jaguar) attended the JAGM Concours d’Elegance in Bloomfield Hills and met Dick and saw his XKSS on display. The rest, as they say, is history: Dick went to Jaguar of Troy for a test drive of an F-Type convertible and ordered a coupe on the spot. Ian Callum personally walked Dick’s new car down the lane in Coventry and Jaguar of Troy delivered it to Dick in May of 2014 with quite a bit of fanfare because it was the first F-Type coupe delivered to Michigan.

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<sup>4</sup> According to Dick, Bill Welsh drove up to Clarkston from Steubenville, OH in his Suburban with an open trailer attached, negotiated a deal with Dick at his kitchen table while he wolfed down a ham sandwich, and then loaded up the car to take it back to Ohio. The entire encounter took less than 30 minutes!

Although Dick christened his F-Type coupe with a vanity plate that reads “FNLRLIDE”, it is not the last Jaguar acquired by him. In the fall of 2015, Dick asked me to find him an X-Type to drive in the winter so he did not have to drive his F-Type. After a short search on the internet, I found a 2006 Jaguar X-Type for sale in BRG and a crème interior. Dick drove the X-Type and I helped him negotiate a fair price for the car. He loved it!

On July 9, 2017, Dick was in an accident with his F-Type. He was caravanning back from the Gilmore Museum with some other JAGM members when he mistakenly pulled out into traffic and got t-boned by another car. Dick sustained some very serious injuries, which indeed made him clairvoyant: the F-Type did become his final ride.

In August of 2017, with Dick still in the hospital trying to recover from his accident, a group of JAGM members worked to get his XKSS ready for the 50<sup>th</sup> Annual JAGM Concours d’Elegance.<sup>5</sup> This was a very special event and one that Dick was determined to attend. However, as his XKSS was taking the field on the morning of September 2, 2017, Dick quietly succumbed to his injuries from the accident. Dick’s continuous ownership of Jaguars for 65 years finally came to an end.



God bless our JAGM friend, Dick Harms.

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<sup>5</sup> Those individuals were Gary Cunningham, Kurt Harms, Bob Matejek, Matt Nold and Greg Swett.