

Getaway!

Bruce Reynolds, Great Train Robber, on doing time with Jaguar's 'getaway car'



In the murky recesses of the underworld, to talk about Jags was to talk about crime. They were associated with every major and many minor robberies spanning three decades.

We too had recognised the XK120's potential upon its introduction. Subsequent acquisition had them fulfilling critical reports, satisfying our criteria with one exception - as a two-seater its application was limited.

Sure, it was perfect for two-man heists, the country club climbs, an early morning smash and grab, creeping a bookie's strides (the silent entry into the sleeper's bedroom and the removal of the target's trousers replete

with loot) and as a sports car it was above suspicion. But as journeymen thieves we longed for the rumoured announcement that the 3.4 engine was going to be dropped into a compact saloon, and in 1955 we saw the advent of the Mk1 2.4. Jaguar's slogan Grace, Pace and Space coincided with our need: the aesthetic of grace was superfluous - what excited us were the fundamental qualities of Pace and Space.

At last we had it all, or so we thought. Sadly, although a genuine 100mph car, the 2.4 was underpowered. It did serve its purpose however and became a much-loved vehicle until the 3.4 arrived in 1957.

This was it, the best road car ever. Fast, with vicious acceleration to match, it was an instant success: everybody who could afford one bought one, those who couldn't stole them.

Predominant among the latter were the professionals. Proud to be pros, we never nicked one unless it had wire wheels and, preferably, was liberally badged-up - Institute of Advanced Motorists, British Racing Drivers' Club - all portents that it was an enthusiast's car and thus well maintained. All personal traces would be removed, plus rear wheel spats - the object being to create a less personalised, more anonymous vehicle. Trips would be made to far distant counties where



March 1964: seven of the train robbers are convicted: Reynolds stayed on the run for five years. Right: police, also MkII-mounted swoop on the Bucks farmhouse used to count the stolen money

"I'd never have guessed I'd be back here 30 years later and broke." Bruce Reynolds revisits Bridego Bridge in October '95, for the first time since the Great Train Robbery of August 1963



An alternative plan that was mooted in respect of the Great Train Robbery would have seen us leaving the scene of the crime in 10 3.8 MkII Jaguars, the gutted interiors replete with mail bags containing over £2 1/2 million in cash. That would have been a pretty sight, upstaging and predated *The Italian Job* by years.

On a more sinister note in 1968 Tony 'The Magpie' Maffia reputed to be the 'Mr Big' of receivers and involved in a £750,000 gold bullion robbery was found shot dead in the front seat of his green MkII Jaguar. It was a classic gangland execution: he had been shot twice, once by the right eye and, the *coup de grace*, once behind the right ear.

The threads of life imitating art or art imitating life run through the Jaguar story. What car introduced us to the BBC's documentary series *The Underworld!* - the Jaguar MkII. Whose voice with gravitas announced the series? - Bob Hoskins. And it was Bob Hoskins who had his 'last ride' in the back of a Jaguar in the contemporary classic

"THEY WERE VICTIMS OF THEIR OWN SUCCESS. TO BE DRIVING ONE MORE THAN TWO-UP WOULD RESULT IN AN IMMEDIATE CHALLENGE"

opening of the M1 and the growth of the motorways led to further expansion of the crim's activities: at the appropriate time Jaguar brought out the MkII series and introduced the 3.8 to give us temporary supremacy.

Now we had the greatest four-door sports saloon in the world. The reaction was immediate: Paddy, my partner and a true enthusiast bought one from Roy Salvadori at Tolworth. Paddy said it was the best car he'd ever owned and went on to buy two more.

But the face of crime was changing. High-speed chases went out largely with technological advances in communications and the *modus operandi* was more the strike at target and the rapid getaway to the nearest changeover point and to less conspicuous vehicles. Used in this fashion Jags were still mandatory but for general use they went out of favour, victims of their own success. Synonymous with crime and criminals, they were a high-profile target for police suspicion. To be driving one more than two-up would result in an immediate challenge by an observant patrol car crew.

Reluctantly we said our farewells. In its time the Jaguar had been a car for all seasons and all reasons for the professional crim. If their racing successes are too numerous to record one can point to the parallels in crime with perhaps a few highlights as examples.

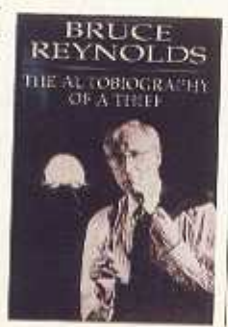
Peter Scott, christened alternatively by the media as the 'Human Fly' or 'King of the Cat Burglars' pulled off the largest jewel theft in the world, valued conservatively at £200,000 in 1960, using a 2.4 MkII Jaguar.

In November 1962 connoisseurs of crime put the London Airport Robbery among the classics of big money snatches when £62,000 was stolen. Two identical metallic blue 3.8 Jaguars were used for the getaway. Ironically one of these belonged to the actor Craig Stevens, who in his television series role as detective Peter Gunn had solved countless payroll robberies.

crime film *The Long Good Friday*. The ironic postscript to my criminal career saw my arrest in 1969 for complicity in The Great Train Robbery and my final - almost - drive to Aylesbury in a MkII 3.4 for trial.

After my 25-year sentence there would be a succession of prison moves, all conducted in high-speed maximum security convoys and always in Coventry's finest, the Jaguar. And that's where I came in.

Bruce Reynolds, the Autobiography of a Thief, is published in paperback by Corgi on March 7 1996, priced £5.99



an identical coloured car would be found and the tax disc stolen to be placed in our 'ringer' on the assumption that the two vehicles with identical plates would be operating in different areas.

This practice was rife: I visited a notorious ringer and saw two identical dark blue 3.4s with the same numberplates. I confronted the guy who slurped his tea before replying: "It must be a clerical error mate..."

In the never-ending war between cops and robbers the opposition caught up with us. Chief constables who had the funds swiftly converted from Wolseley 6/90s to Jags and were competing on equal terms. The