

CLASSIC DRIVER

[This unique Jensen P66 was Intercepted by the Italians](#)

Lead
Company politics are never easy, often causing damage and even the demise of some of the great automotive manufacturers. For Jensen, boardroom back-talk and ill feelings ultimately resulted in them perhaps missing out on a sure-fire hit in the form of this prototype, the P66...

Best intentions



As the Jensen sits purring against the quintessentially British backdrop of quaint brick houses and a downcast sky, it's hard to image something so achingly pretty being the cause of such upset. Conceived by Richard Jensen and his chief engineer/chief body designer, Eric Neale, project P66 was created in the hopes of replacing the profitable Austin Healey 3000 sports car, also produced under the BMC group, aiming to utilise any spare capacity in the plant should the 3000's production end and the P66 become a big-ticket earner for Jensen. Reasoning that the American market, a key market for the Healey, would continue to demand open-top European sports cars, the P66 was aimed to be cheaper than Jensen's C-V8 but still retain the Chrysler V8 engine, and it would feature a new outrigger-tubed chassis, aluminium body as handsome as that of the Healey, and wear the name 'Interceptor'.

Communication crisis





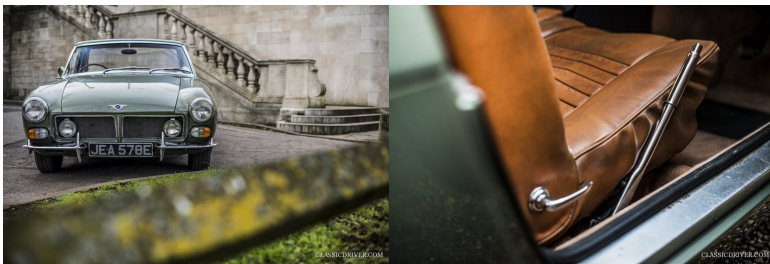
Following the axing of the Austin Healey 3000, the P66 was put into prototype phase, with Neale drawing up a convertible body that delighted spectators at the 1965 Earls Court Motor Show. It was a winning combination of sleek, understated styling and the classic V8, but what the public couldn't understand was where this new model would fit in the Jensen line-up. With the understandable misconception being that the P66 was a replacement for the CV-8 grand tourer and not the peppy Austin Healey 3000, the lower price point and lack of roof perplexed buyers somewhat. Nonetheless, the reception was positive, and the plucky Brits decided to build a coupe prototype to complement the convertible. However, darker, cost-conscious forces were at play, and management had other ideas for a new Jensen.

Power trumps passion



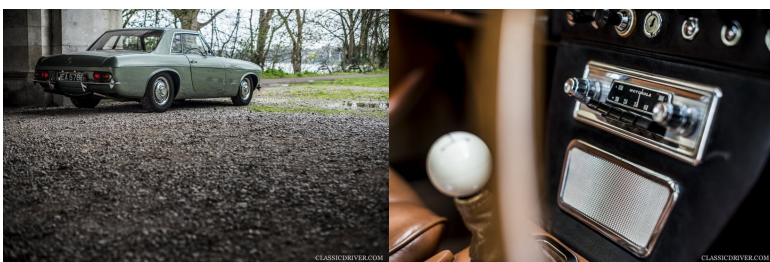
The pencil-pushing management team decided that what was really needed was a C-V8 replacement, not a Healey replacement, and that Neale's body was too boring and in need of some Italian flavour from the fashionable design houses of Touring, Ghia, or Vignale. On the roads of north London in 2017, the notion that this car is in anyway lacking is unfathomable. The body of the P66 is something of a greatest hits of automotive design classics, somehow tying them all together into a package that keeps pulling you in for a closer look. There are elements of the Ferrari 250 GT Pininfarina, Mercedes SL Pagoda, and Lamborghini 350 GT — even delicious creases akin to the Lancia Fulvia Sport Zagato — which, coupled with the dignified hum of the 6.3 V8, makes the sight of the P66 both compelling and confusing in equal measure.

End of the line



Back at Jensen, management was beginning to phase out Neale and the P66, but not without rubbing their plans for the future in his face. He was flown to Italy and taken to Touring and Vignale. There, behind closed doors, in private meetings for management only, the design for the C-V8 replacement was created, initially by Touring and then with final touches by Vignale. This was the death of the P66, the birth of the Interceptor as we know it, and, the final straw for Neale. After over 20 years at Jensen, Neale handed his resignation in to the Jensen brothers, who then retired a month later, not before apparently ordering that both P66 prototypes be dismantled...

Invincible Interceptor



Somehow, the coupe managed to avoid such an inhumane fate. Now the sole product of the P66 program and the only coupe in existence, this ill-fated Jensen is both a joy to behold as well as a sad reminder of what could have been. Everything stacks in this car's favour, from the demure Californian Sage Green paint to the incredible interior, which is a design masterclass in itself, complete with Smiths gauges perfectly angled towards the driver and tactile toggle switches. The car is an elegantly suited thug, a true British muscle car, complete

with a V8 and four-on-the-floor manual transmission. Having been obsessively restored and cherished by its previous custodian, it starts on a dime and cruises in dignified comfort until a squeeze on the accelerator uncorks the rapturous exhaust note. Of course, one cannot possibly comment on events of the past, and regardless of the executive decision to axe the P66 and build the Interceptor that management wanted, one thing is for certain — those who did not get to experience the P66 missed out on something special.

Photos: Rémi Dargegen for Classic Driver © 2017

Gallery

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