



What a way to go!

Nigel Thorley visits businessman Ian Hazel who has a passion for Jaguar and Daimler, as a classic car owner and as a commercial entrepreneur.

This is the first of stories we will be occasionally running about the commercial side of owning Jaguars and Daimlers. While most of our members enjoy their cars for what is usually termed as “social, domestic and pleasure” purposes, there are those who run their cars as part of their business. In some cases that is as a company supplied and funded car, in others as a chauffeur or, as in the case of the

X-type report recently, as a training vehicle. This month we look at one regular supporter of the Jaguar (and Daimler) marque, Ian Hazel, an established funeral director in the West Midlands area of the UK.

A family business extraordinaire

Ian's great grand-father was Arthur Hazel, a grave digger at the local parish church and he started a funeral business in 1901 with a single hearse, then of course horse driven. By 1917 he had taken his three sons into partnership and formed the business of A. Hazel & Sons operating out of Erdington in Birmingham. In the 1920s he gained his first motorized vehicle, a van

but still used horse drawn hearses for some considerable time. Indeed, even during World War 2, horses were the favoured mode of transport for lots of reasons, not least because of petrol rationing.

By 1937 the business expanded to the point that they acquired purpose-built premises in Erdington from which to run the growing funeral directorship. By this time they had a varied selection of cars as diverse as Renault and Rolls-Royce.

Ian's father and uncle joined the growing family business after the second world war, after which motorized transport became the norm for funerals. Even after the war, this part of the business still involved the purchase of pre-owned vehicles, usually coming from the likes of



the landed gentry who were disposing of large saloons and limousines in favour of newer vehicles. By tradition most of these cars (usually Daimlers anyway) were painted black and even on occasions, carried crests on the door, a feature that the Hazels retained as a mark of prestige!

The business was doing well and by the early 1960s purchased its first two new Daimler DR450 limousines and a hearse built by Thomas Startin of Birmingham on a DR450 chassis. In the 1970s they moved onto the DS420 limousines, a model that became synonymous with the carriage trade and ambassadorial operations. The hearse was coach built on the DS420 chassis, also by Thomas Startin.

Ian Hazel joined the business of A Hazel & Sons in 1977 as the 4th generation of the family, after serving some years in industry to gain experience and qualifications in business. By 1987 Ian's father had died, his uncle had retired and another local funeral director, Harold Hodgson acquired the Hazel's business (now part of a larger organisation, Dignity Funerals Ltd). Ian then left the business a few months later to start his own operation, Ian Hazel Funerals Ltd., Sutton Coldfield and now his daughters are part of the 5th generation of Hazel's to be involved with the profession. The

family connection goes further as Ian's father in law used to run another funeral business on the south side of Birmingham!

The Ian Hazel Funerals Fleet

When Ian first started his business he tended to hire in cars and a hearse when needed, a principle that some funeral directors still do today. It's a way of keeping costs down and



The early days of the Hazel family business with a varied array of cars including Daimler (of course), Renault and is that a Maudesley?

helps businesses cope with periods of high demand, without having to buy and maintain larger than normal fleets which would lie unused for a lot of the time. Ian hired these cars from his father-in-law who also used Daimlers that carried specific registration numbers, all of which used the digits "777".

The first hearse that Ian actually purchased was a Daimler DS420 hearse produced by the specialist coachbuilders Woodall Nicholson in Lancashire from his father-in-law, registered 777 FCH. He then went on to purchase his own DS420 limousines and a Startin's DS420 "low'line" hearse. He decided to buy in specific registration numbers with the digits "777", and he still maintains

Right: What the author thinks are Daimler Fifteen limousines with a DE36 hearse, all from the pre-second world war period



Getting into the Daimler tradition, with a Rolls interloper on the far left hand side.



A Daimler DE36 hearse, the chassis of which would have graced many a Royal coachbuilt limousine over the years.



Ian Hazel taking delivery from Wilcox the first set of XJ40 cars and a hearse.

those numbers on all his vehicles today. In the early 1990s it was time to update the fleet and Wilcox Limousines were called in to supply their Eagle produced stretched 6-door versions of the then current XJ40 models along with a suitable hearse to complete the set. Although badged as Daimlers these were (as current cars) actually Jaguar models, supplied from the Jaguar factory, less certain aspects of trim. Eagle Coachworks convert the cars by stripping the shell, cutting it and adding the relevant extra length, in this case, to accommodate three doors per side. The cars not only carried Daimler badging and trim but also Insignia styled hub caps on conventional steel wheels.

In 2000 the cars were changed for the then current XJ8 models, with 3.2 litre engines, again badged as Daimlers and supplied by Wilcox.

Four years ago it was time for another change of vehicle and again Jaguar and Wilcox were chosen as the favoured suppliers. By this time the Eagle Coachworks had been able to re-engineer the X-350 all aluminium bodyshell to produce new limousines and hearses for the carriage trade.

Initially Ian purchased a single hearse



A. Hazel & Sons first DS420 models along with a DR450 Daimler Majestic Major limousine on the far left.



Early DS420 models in the Ian Hazel fleet with the first hearse they purchased on the left.



The first six door models entered the Hazel fleet, all XJ40 models



the year, 2000 and the first modern V8 cars to enter the fleet.



Ian Hazel's personal E-type, a Series 2 fhc with Minilite wheels.



A matched pair, X-350 6-door limousine and matching 4-door hearse.



Having 3 doors per side...



...plus no division, allowed for an extra set of fixed seating and better comfort for passengers in the X-350 stretched limousines.



A very well executed conversion to six-door accommodation by Eagle Specialist Vehicles in Lancashire.

and one car, both 4.2 litre models. A year later he purchased another two new cars and a year later yet another car, although this time a pre-owned example, making a total of the four cars you see depicted here along with the hearse and one XJ8 model retained from the previous fleet.

The vehicles don't cover a high mileage, around 3000 miles per annum for a car and perhaps up to 4000 miles for a hearse.

Two of my final questions to Ian also related to the cars. Firstly, why stay with Jaguar (or Daimler)? His comments were "whilst I could buy combinations of other cars like Volvos, Mercedes, Saabs or even Vauxhalls, I am fortunate enough to be able to afford Jaguars and Daimlers. They represent quality and prestige and honestly have more room in the back than most of the others. As long as they are produced, I shall retain my loyalty to the brand."



The high roof allows plenty of space and for the funeral staff to wear their top hats.



Adequate accommodation!



Ample seating for the bearers in the hearse.

This led to my last question about the future. What next? "I have already seen the latest New XJ in prototype form at Wilcox and surprisingly, despite its very modern styling, found that the stretch works very well. Although there won't be any Daimler badged versions available, I will almost certainly be moving on to that model later, probably in 3.0 litre diesel form."

And finally, I ought to mention that Ian Hazel is a member of the Club and does own his own personal Jaguar, a classic E-type Series 2 fhc. ■



Ian Hazel, ready for business.

Thanks

Thanks to Ian Hazel for his time and allowing me to photograph his vehicles and reproduce images from his archive. More information on Ian Hazel Funerals Ltd., can be found on their website at www.ianhazelfunerals.co.uk