

The 'Cat' Is Back

For those of you who have longed for the glory days of Jaguar, they're back. "These are the best vehicles Jaguar has ever made, by far and away the best I've ever seen in my career – *and my life,*" says Steve Kauffman, a Jaguar enthusiast for a half century.

Indeed, Jaguar has returned to its sports-car roots. And the iconic British brand didn't just look to its glorious past to resurrect itself – it had its eye on the future.

For instance, Jaguar's new F-Type "is totally modern, luxurious and has road manners that would be impressive on a car *twice its price,*" Kauffman says.

As one of top sales people at the Rusnak Auto Group's Jaguar Land Rover Anaheim Hills, Kauffman couldn't be more joyous that he is right smack in the middle of this Jaguar rebirth.

The legendary and prestigious brand recorded a 42% year on year increase in sales in 2013 - its strongest full year sales performance since 2005. And from all indications, reports and surveys, 2014 is expected to exceed that.

"The value of a car is just phenomenal," Kauffman says. "When you compare the Jaguar XJ to the BMW 7 Series, the Mercedes S Class and the Audi 8 Series, Jaguar is a much better value considering the performance and handling you are getting -- along with the styling.



"I just don't know how Jaguar makes such a great car at such a reasonable price. It's truly a superior product for the money."

Jaguar suffered through one of the worst nightmares possible for an auto manufacturer and brand in the '80s and '90s. The company didn't have the funds to fix its problem, image or reputation – or



Jaguar has returned to become one of the hottest vehicles on the planet -- and no one is happier about this renaissance than Steve Kauffman.



build a better product. So other luxury brands like Mercedes, BMW and Audi raced past it and took control of market share.

No more.

While sales continue to be brisk for Mercedes, BMW and Audi, Jaguar has raced right into the picture and has become quite a sparring partner for the other popular brands.

"It's really a miracle that Jaguar survived the catastrophe of the '80s and '90s," says Kauffman, who drives a classic and immaculate '06 S-Type R V8.

"Ford basically resuscitated Jaguar," he adds.

"Ford taught Jaguar how to make a spectacular product and how to streamline the product line. Ford put in a lot of cash in and the Jaguar product got much better. It takes a while to turn a bad reputation around, but Jaguar did it."

Thanks in large part to Tata Motors, which purchased Jaguar and Land Rover from Ford in 2008 for \$2.3 billion. With billions of dollars of additional investment committed to the Jaguar brand, Tata has succeed in catapulting the brand to where it is today.

For decades, the perception of Jaguar was that it is "an old person's car" ...that it was your "father's car" -- or even your "*grandfather's car*." Younger people gravitated toward other sports cars like Porsche and would mumble to themselves, "Aww, I'll get to a Jag when I'm in my 60s."

In some circles, that misperception still exists today. Surprisingly, that view evolved despite Jaguar's mega-rich racing heritage: it once dominated Le Mans, the world's oldest sports car endur-

ance race and one of the most famous and influential in motorsports history. In fact, Jaguar is ranked fourth all-time in Le Mans victories, trailing only Porsche, Audi and Ferrari.

"Jaguar is completely reversing the perception young people have that it's an 'old person's car,'" Kauffman says. "Once you drive it, it's like, 'Wow, this really is an incredible product and machine.'"

Kauffman grew up in Chicago as a huge car enthusiast. His fascination with cars -- and particularly

Jaguar -- goes as far back as he can remember -- even as young as five years old, when he would flip through car magazines like Road and Track at stores and in his room.

He remembers trying to scrounge up a nickel here, a dime there, to buy Car and Driver Magazine.

"No one in my family, or any of my friends, were into cars as much I was," he says.

He saw his first Jaguar up close when he was nine -- a neighbor's 1969 Jag sedan. "I was in awe," he says. "It was coolest car I'd ever seen. Nothing came close, not even a Corvette."

During his early teenage years, when he wasn't racing dirt bikes and mini bikes through the neighborhood and in parks, Kauffman was working on and restoring cars. He was considered the neighborhood car guru.

By 16, he was buying, restoring and selling cars -- and making a pretty good buck for someone his age.

During high school, Kauffman worked as a lot porter at a dealership around the corner from his house. He'd often see some of the sales people throwing a football around in the lot.

That image resonated with him.

"I remember thinking, 'they're such care-free, fun-loving guys,'" Kauffman says. "I thought to myself, 'I wouldn't mind doing that one day. The image of them throwing the football around stuck with me.'"

Initially, Kauffman planned to make a career in marketing. That was his major at Bradley University. While at school, he needed a job to pay ex-

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penses, so he landed a position in sales at a Nissan dealer in Highland Park, Ill.

He’s been in the business ever since.

When he hit 38 years old, “I was at the crossroads of my life,” he says -- and he decided it was time to put Chicago in his rear view mirror.

“I just got so sick of the weather,” he says. “Thirty-eight years in *that weather* was 38 years too long,” he adds with a laugh.

He had always dreamed of going to California. He decided that “if I don’t do it now, I’ll never do it.” He did it. And he discovered on Day 1 that “it is truly paradise,” he says.

Life’s never been grander, especially since he joined “The Rusnak Family,” as he calls it.

“When you talk about premier dealerships and companies, Rusnak is at the top of the list,” he says. “They do everything the ‘right’ way.”

After spending most of his career selling BMWs and Audis at various dealerships in Southern California, Kauffman finally landed at the “right spot” to sell his “dream car” – Jaguars.

Also part of that “dream” is motorcycles. Kauffman has two – a Yamaha FJR 1300 with 235,000 miles on it and a Suzuki GSXR, also with 200,000+ miles on it.



“I don’t even have 100,000 miles on my one car and Steve has two motorcycles with more than 200,000,” laughs Khalid Omar, the General Sales Manager for Jaguar Land Rover Anaheim Hills.

“That says a lot about Steve.”

To Kauffman, nothing matches the outdoor exhilaration of motorcycle riding. Well, except, of course, driving his Jaguar.

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***Steve Kauffman
Jaguar Land Rover
Anaheim Hills
5425 E. La Palma Ave.
Anaheim Hills, CA 92807
(714) 693-4646
skauffman@jlrah.com
www.JLRAH.com***