

The Announcement of the Jaguar E-Type at the Parc des Eaux Vives, Geneva, March 15, 1961, 4:30 p.m.

The world Announcement of the Jaguar E-Type took place at the Restaurant du Parc des Eaux Vives, Geneva (close to the lake right behind the famous fountain). March 15, 1961, 4:30 P.M., the day preceding the opening of the Salon International de l'Auto, was a most suited date and time for one of the most important car announcements of the sixties. The launch involved two Jaguar E-Types. a third one would join them after the opening of the Salon. Two were Coupes, 885002 and 885005, the third, 77RW, a Cabriolet that was driven over from England by Norman Dewis, Chief Test Engineer, in a heroic drive through a dark and foggy night.

For the launch celebration Sir William Lyons had invited specifically by name a selected group of enthusiasts, racing drivers, Jaguar dealers, and of course automotive media people. Practically all had accepted. To be sure, the meeting was announced as a formal gathering on invitation of the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders (SMMT) who took care of all expenses. The invited guests gathered shortly before 4:30 p.m. in the main hall of the Restaurant where a large plywood box had been set up. On Sir William's signal, the top part of the box was lifted, the sides folded down, and out came the gunmetal grey E-Type Coupe 885005. An instance of blank astonishment and admiration let all fall in silence. Although rumour had abounded this was the first time when people outside of Jaguar could lie their eyes upon a Jaguar E-Type. As photos show, many of those attending literally crawled over and under the exhibited car. Possibly no other sports car ever had created such an emotional stir among the spectators present at their announcements. Photos show Sir William next to Head of PR, EW 'Bill' Rankin, standing behind 885005, the cover of the box still visible at the top.

After a while all those attending were asked to step outside where 885002 (9600HP) awaited them for a photo session together with Sir William towering over the car. It was then that the media noticed the license number 9600HP – which from then on was thought as the registration of the first E-Type ever shown – which it is not. Although 885002 had been shown in late February to explicitly selected journalists the honour of being the very first shown to a broader public remains with 885005, "the car taken out of a box inside of the Restaurant du Parc des Eaux Vives".

Later that evening 885005 was taken over to the Geneva Salon de l'Auto [then still] in downtown Geneva for exposition on the Jaguar stand. At the opening ceremony of the Salon on March 16 it was that car that was demonstrated by Emil Frey Sr., founder and chief executive of the Emil Frey Company (today Emil Frey Group) to the then Swiss President, Federal Councillor Dr. Friedrich Traugott Wahlen. A large number of further photos show 885005 standing on a Persian rug – typical for Jaguar exhibits at that time. One highly interesting picture (attached) shows an important group of gentlemen in front of the Coupe, (from right to left) Bill Heyns, (Chief Engineer Jaguar Cars), Sir William Lyons, and Rudolf Uhlenhaut (Chief Engineer Mercedes Benz Competition Cars). Highly interesting but not further astonishing that one of the motor trades best known engineers would look over the product presented for the first time by one of its key competitors.