

# 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Panther Cars “HOW IT ALL BEGAN”



**Robert Jankel, Car Designer and Engineer**  
**Born London 1 January 1938 - died Weybridge,**  
**Surrey 25 May 2005**

**Married 1962 to Jennifer Loss (daughter of**  
**bandleader Joe Loss –had three sons, one daughter)**

Cars with six wheels are uncommon. The most famous is the pink Rolls-Royce owned by Lady Penelope Creighton-Ward in the 1960s television puppet show Thunderbirds. Robert Jankel went one better than these fantasy machines - he created the 1977 Panther Six actually to be driven on the road. The outrageous two-seater roadster was the showstopper of London's 1977 Motorfair, flashed across global television screens because it was said to do 200mph.





Only two Panther Sixes were made but only one completed at the factory; Pirelli's inability to deliver its unique low-profile tyres for the four front wheels was among the reasons why full production never began. But it propelled Panther to worldwide attention.

Robert Jankel built his first car in 1954, a home-made affair based on a wrecked Austin Seven. His father, Alexander, a haberdashery manufacturer in the East End of London, had to road-test it, because his car-mad son was only 16. A year later, he was one of the first pupils at St Paul's School to drive in for lessons - certainly the first ever to arrive in a car of his own design.

Apart from sport, rowing in particular, the academic ethos of St Paul's was at odds with Jankel's restless temperament. He departed to study Engineering at Chelsea College, and then began a precarious stint as a car salesman, where his father was usually his most loyal repeat customer. Eventually, he agreed to join Goldenfelds, the family firm, where he became sales manager and also designed children's ranges, but his weekends were all about amateur motor racing and he was a partner in an Essex-based car-tuning business. In 1962 he married Jennifer Loss, daughter of the bandleader Joe Loss, whom he had known since his schooldays



In 1970, he restored a vintage Rolls-Royce for a family holiday to Spain, and the result was so magnificent that he sold it there to a bullfighter for £10,000. Requests for similar renovated cars soon led to a flourishing side line, and in 1971 he quit the clothing industry to establish his own car company. He named it Panther Westwinds, the first word a good-humoured dig at Jaguar, the second the name of his house in Weybridge, Surrey, where the firm was based in the garage. in order to express their commitment to the automotive style of the past the company's first car was the J72, capturing the rakish lines of a typical 1930s sports car but powered by reliable modern engines. Jankel opened a small factory nearby in Byfleet and recruited experienced craftsmen to build the cars. Orders poured in after the J72 was featured in the men's magazine Mayfair and Panther was soon building a car every week.



Jankel's showmanship was evident in numerous subsequent models, especially the sumptuous 1975 Deville powered by a Jaguar engine and modelled after the Bugatti Royale. The De Ville cost twice as much as a Rolls-Royce Silver Shadow, and only the wealthiest of collectors could afford it and featured in two movies: *The Golden Lady* (1979), a James Bond spoof starring Christina World, and *101 Dalmatians* (1996), as transport for Cruella De Vil, played by Glenn Close.



After a year the Panther Rio was launched and was based on the Triumph Dolomite. The luxurious saloon cost three times as much as a Dolomite, however, and only 38 were produced. The 1976 Lima sports car was then Panther's most successful venture before the company was sold to a South Korean fur trader.





However, Jankel was soon back in business producing "stretched" versions of expensive cars like Mercedes-Benz and Range Rover under the Le Marquis banner. The quality of the work was so exacting that a six-door conversion of the Rolls-Royce Silver Spur was marketed by Rolls itself. Eventually, the Jankel Group spread to include three automotive companies: a design consultancy, a military vehicles division and a coach-building business. Jankel became experts in armour-plating, leading to a deal with the Jordanian government to build ballistics-proof Aegis vehicles, and another to make armoured Toyotas for the United Nations.

"Our secret is we've never told anyone who we've sold our cars to," said Jankel in 2001, the year he discovered he had pancreatic cancer: Also, we don't manufacture - we have joint-venture partners for that - although we have 45 design engineers working at our base in Weybridge. Mercedes-Benz do their own limousines, I know, but we can offer a much more bespoke interior that will really fit a client's personal needs.

**JANKEL**

JANKEL ARMOURING LIMITED  
a member of the Jankel Group of Companies

Robert and Jennifer Jankel were founder members almost 40 years ago of the North West Surrey Synagogue, and were also among Britain's most successful deer farmers, after the few animals bought to keep

the grass down on their 15-acre Surrey estate turned into a 600-strong herd.

Having bought the Panther name back from Korean ownership in 1999, Jankel was finalising a new sports car design when he died. Described by his son Andrew as an "unfinished symphony", it was intended for production in the United States.



**THE J99**



**Val Bridges**