

**FORGOTTEN HEROES Panther De Ville**

**1977 Panther De Ville For Sale £44,500**

This stunning Panther De Ville is in Metallic Spice and Bahama Yellow. Opulent red velour interior. Modelled on the 1930s Bugatti Royale driven by Al Capone.  
www.classiccarsforsale.co.uk/classic-car-page/104994/1977-panther-deville/

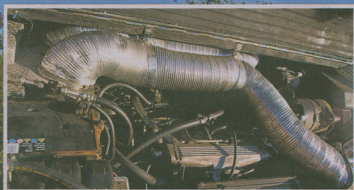


**www.panthercarclub.com**

On the first Saturday of September, the Panther Car Club organises a gathering for its members. The 2012 event will be held at Brooklands, a fitting tribute to Robert Janek and the business he founded.



**Panther De Ville FORGOTTEN HEROES**



The tubular-framed De Ville used a straight-six or V12 engine courtesy of Jaguar



Suspension, power steering and automatic transmission also came from Jaguar



Panther logo reflected more traditional times



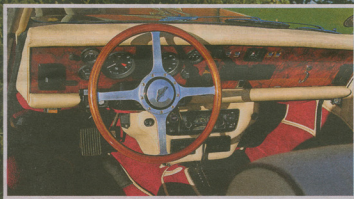
Big headlights imitated the Bugatti Royale



Big sills illustrate Panther's over-engineering approach



The cockpit of the De Ville followed Jaguar fashion



Interiors were lavish and often featured TV sets and drinks bar, surrounded by the highest quality materials



Leather craftsmanship was carried out to a high standard: no wonder rich and flamboyant customers were lined up

# Retro's glamorous Godfather

MIKE TAYLOR profiles a maverick British classic creation

Panther Westwinds was the brainchild of fashion designer turned car manufacturer Robert Janek, who turned a passion and a pastime into a world-renowned coaching business. In 1970, Janek constructed a one-off tourer with running boards, upright angular bodywork

and huge headlights, based loosely on a vintage Rolls-Royce. The car was used for a family holiday in Spain, only to be bought by a bullfighter for £10,000. It was a portent for the future. Robert then turned his attention to building a prototype sports car using the Jaguar S5100 as his influence. Called the J72, the car was featured in *Mayfair* magazine, stimulating a number of orders. As the orders rolled in, Robert's company relocated to a factory next door to the Brooklands race track. The company's craftsmen used only quality materials to ensure the highest standard of finish. Initially, the J72 featured the 3.8-litre Jaguar straight-six engine, a solid rear axle and unique beam front axle. Later cars would be offered with either the 4.2- or 5.3-litre engines.

Two years after the J72, Robert launched his masterpiece: the regal Panther De Ville with its long bonnet and 1930s styling. Like the J72, it was a pastiche of design themes based loosely on the Bugatti Royale known as the Coupe Napoleon, which was powered by a 14.7-litre engine and was used by Ettore Bugatti himself. Robert's interpretation again used mainly Jaguar XJ parts. At launch, the De Ville was available as a saloon only. Then, in 1976 and after some 30 De Villes had been built, a soft-top version was created. Of the first four made, three had power booms and were exported to LA, Lagos and Sicily. The fourth appeared at the Earl's Court Motor Show with a manually-operated hood and removable hard-top. The foundation for the De Ville was a rectangular steel ladder frame chassis of sufficient torsional rigidity to handle the car's length, overall weight and the 200hp provided by the mighty V12 Jaguar engine. All assembly was carried out in-house, with the rolling chassis receiving its hand-crafted aluminium bodyshell. Panther was not averse to using items such as door frames from mainstream car-makers if it made the task easier – saloon De Villes used Austin Maxi doors, for example – while switches and controls were also raided from the parts bins of large manufacturers. It took Panther's skilled staff some 2000 hours to complete each De Ville. Few mechanical changes were required to turn a saloon into a convertible – the body tub featured two doors rather than four, although the wheelbase and overall length were unaffected; only the width of the body was increased slightly to accommodate the hood mechanism. Also, the trunk on the rear of the saloon – it actually formed part of the tail section – was adapted to give a more sloping angle to suit the different outlines of the convertible.

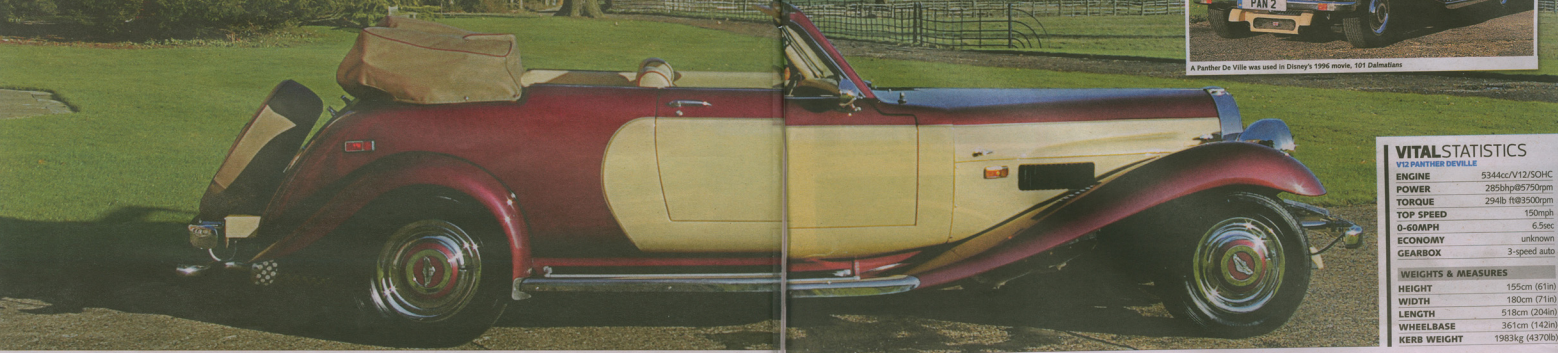
Included in the standard equipment was air conditioning, electric windows and two-tone paintwork. Optional extras included various choices of audio equipment, a steel-filing sunroof, a detachable hard-top for the convertible and a TV. In addition, customers were offered either the six-cylinder or V12 Jaguar power units. Though only the larger unit was fitted to cars bound for America, as this was the only version homologated for the US market, for cars delivered to hot climates and remote places such as Nigeria and New Caledonia, Panther recommended the straight-six unit. Among notable Panther De Ville clients were Arab royalty, while in the UK both pop star Elton John and actor Oliver Reed took delivery. In 1986, a Panther De Ville appeared in the movie *101 Dalmatians* as the car owned by Cruella De Vil, played by Glenn Close, with the Jaguar engine replaced by a small block Chevrolet unit. With automatic transmission (though manual transmission could be ordered), power-assisted steering and powerful brakes, the De Ville was always an easy car to drive, so long as its 5'9m length and 180cm width were kept in mind, although its weight and upright architecture tended to dampen performance, even with V12 power. Few London motor show events passed without Panther receiving accolades for its high standards of coachbuilding, but then sales of the J72 and the De Ville began to decline and, in November 1979, the company went into receivership, with a total of 57 De Villes having been built. The company was eventually sold to a South Korean buyer. After the sale, Robert Janek changed direction, and began supplying stretch versions of Mercedes and Range Rovers under the Le Marquis branding. The new company eventually expanded to include a design consultancy, a coachbuilding business and an aircraft vehicle production plant, products which continue to be offered by Robert's son Robert after the Janek Group today. In 2001, Robert began work on a new car, but he passed away on 25 May 2005. The final project on which he had been working remained unfinished.



Thanks to Andrew Janek and Val and Ray Bridge for their help in the preparation of this article



A Panther De Ville was used in Disney's 1996 movie, *101 Dalmatians*



**VITAL STATISTICS**  
V12 PARTNER DEVILLE

ENGINE	534Acc/V12/SOHC
POWER	285hp@5750rpm
TORQUE	294lb ft@3500rpm
TOP SPEED	150mph
0-60MPH	6.5sec
ECONOMY	unknown
GEARBOX	3-speed auto

**WEIGHTS & MEASURES**

HEIGHT	155cm (61in)
WIDTH	180cm (71in)
LENGTH	518cm (204in)
WHEELBASE	361cm (142in)
KERB WEIGHT	1983kg (4370lb)