



Newsletter

On TV—*The Sweeney*, Series 1

The Sweeney is an iconic British police drama produced by Thames Television in the mid-1970s. Thames was both a broadcaster of the British ITV television network, covering the London area, and a producer of television programmes.



The Thames television ident introduced in 1970 when colour broadcasts began. It was used for the next 20 years.

The Sweeney started life as a single pilot program, *Regan*, aired on *Armchair Cinema*, Thursday, June 4, 1974 at 9:00 pm. The story line was a Flying Squad investigation into a savage gangland killing.

The main character was the brutal Detective Inspector Jack Regan, played by John Thaw. Regan was unlike any previous British television police officer. His ill temper led to the use of violence against villains who were hard men with shooters. Unlike previous studio dramas, it was filmed on the real streets of West London. Regan would drive a 1970 Ford Granada; however the villains were not given Jaguars in the pilot.

The Sweeney was created by Ian Kennedy Martin, a British television writer with many screen credits to his name, including

films *The Saint* and *The Chinese Detective* and episodes for *The Saint*, *The Protectors* and *Special Branch*. He has since written 10 books featuring Regan and *The Sweeney*.

When asked, in an interview, what his idea for the series was, Martin replied, "I thought that this would make a very good television series – a guy who is being hounded, trying to do his job – an old style copper, going around knocking the living daylight out of anybody who thinks they can get a bit smart."



Regan attracted an audience of over 7 million, enough to do ahead with a series based around the central character. It would be named *The Sweeney*, derived from the cockney rhyming slang 'Sweeney Todd/ Flying Squad'.

After World War 1, crime in England increased dramatically. The Metropolitan Police decided to create a mobile force of officers who would be unrestricted as to where they went in order to smash up gangs of armed burglars, gangs who carried out smash and grabs, car thieves and pickpockets. The force was pro-

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vided with horse-drawn covered wagons to patrol the streets, with interchangeable names of businesses slotted into the sides of the wagons. Underneath the canvas hoods, the detectives looked through spyholes to catch thieves. Because they could operate anywhere in the Metropolitan Police District they **were called The 'Flying Squad'.** The 12-month experiment was so successful that motor cars soon replaced the wagons.



Flying Squad officers with their Bentley, circa 1930



Robbery Cinema Lobby card see Newsletter Vol. 8, No. 6

By the time of the 'S'-type, the Flying Squad detectives numbered over a thousand, and are still called 'the Sweeney' today.

The Flying Squad investigated the Great Train Robbery in 1963. They gathered incriminating evidence and arrested the infamous Kray twins in May 1968. 'S'-types appear in both films of these famous cases, *Robbery* (1967) was reviewed in *Newsletters* Vol. 2, No. 10 and Vol. 7, No. 3E, and *The Krays* (1990) reviewed in *Newsletter* Vol. 7, No. 11.



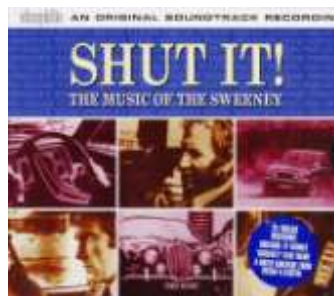
The Sweeney was aired between January 2, 1975 and December 28, 1978, on Mondays in the 9-10:00 pm time slot. There were 53 episodes (Four series were made with 13 episodes in each of the first three series and 14 in the final series), the pilot television film *Regan*, and two spin-off cinema films, *Sweeney!* (1976) in which a Jaguar XJ6 has a 2 star role and *Sweeney 2* (1978) with a Jaguar XJ6 in a 3 star role, with a further film adaptation, *The Sweeney* (2012) in which a Jaguar XFR has a 3 star role.

A young, age 32, John Thaw starred in *The Sweeney* television series, a decade before becoming famous for driving his Jaguar Mk2, in his role as *Inspector Morse*, in the 1987-2000 television series of that name. If you watched *Inspector Morse*, you will recognize the 10-years younger John Thaw, but not his hard edged, undisciplined, frequently violent, often devious and sometimes illegal, but usually successful investigative methods as he pursues the villains of that era.



A young John Thaw with his co-star Dennis Waterman

The Sweeney's introduction and opening credits are on background drawings of The Sweeney in a Ford Consul GT, registration NHK295M, chasing villains in a Jaguar 'S'-type, registration DWD606C. The 46 second opening car chase is accompanied by the upbeat *The Sweeney* opening theme played by The Harry



'S'-type in on the cover of the music CD, Shut It! The Music Of The Sweeney

South Orchestra. South was an English jazz pianist, composer, and arranger, who later moved into work for film and television.

Pages 5 and 6 of this Newsletter show 24 of the opening's drawings. The complete 46-second opening can be seen and heard at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D99O6oTJVHo&&FORM=VRDGAR>

In *The Sweeney* series 1, Inspector Jack Regan is usually driven in an unmarked Ford Granada. 'S'-types appear in six of the 13 episodes, but there is not one in the first episode, where the crooks use a white XJ6 in a hijacking. There are two 'S'-type car chases in Episode 10, *Stoppo Driver*, and another in Episode 11, *Big Spender* in which the opening 'S'-type, DWD606C, appears. All series 1 episodes were shot in 1974.



The Sweeney opening Series 1 DVD case

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Episode 2, Jackpot, first broadcast January 9, 1975, opens with a smash-and-grab robbery of a security van in the Royal Crescent Mews, Shepherd's Bush, London. The robbers are using a dark blue 'S'-type. Regan and The Sweeney, in a long brutally fight, subdue and capture all the villains and recover the loot – but later find that £35,000 is missing. The discrepancy is headlined on the *Daily Chronicle* and The Sweeney are pressured to find it. They discover how and who, but the money is gone.



See this episode at: <https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x3o9ufx>

Episode 4, **Queen's Pawn**, was broadcast January 23, 1975. After a high-powered lawyer gets Johnny Lyons and three compatriots off on a murder charge, Regan is authorized to use whatever means necessary to bring the hoodlums in. The episode shows how Regan is willing to bend the rules in order to get a result, as he fabricates



evidence, illegally opens private mail, and even arranges the kidnapping of one of the criminals in order to get him to inform on the rest. Lyon hires an assassin. There are interior and exterior shots as he drives a green 'S'-type (LLX999D) to Emilio's restaurant (actually filmed in The Red Cow pub, Hammersmith Road, Hammersmith), where he kills one of the gang. Regan arrests Lyon when the 'kidnapped' gang member 'grasses' before he can be killed.

See this episode at: <https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x3o9ujj>

Episode 7, The Placer, was broadcast February 13, 1975. Regan goes undercover as a lorry driver to expose a hijacking operation. As he gets close to the gang leaders, two villains become sus-

picious. They start following him in an opalescent silver blue 'S'-type, with a black vinyl roof (OLY214E). They pass The Blind Beggar Pub, in the East End of London, where Ronnie Kray murdered George Cornell. The 'S'-type is seen in eight scenes as they capture Regan. They take him to a warehouse to rough him up and finally to a chemical plant (filmed at Staines gas works in Middlesex, England) where the big boss works. Regan sets them upon each other, gets loose and shots at them escaping in the 'S'-type, ending in a crash.



See this episode at: <https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x3o9uro>

Episode 10, Stoppo Driver, was first broadcast June 3, 1975. This is one of the 'iconic' episodes of *The Sweeney*, even more so, as it has the Flying Squad chasing a Jaguar 'S'-type at both the beginning and the end of the episode.

"Stoppo Driver" is London crime slang for getaway driver, or wheelman. In the opening sequence, before the credits, Regan and crew interrupt a "blagging" (London crime slang for a



street snatch, or robbery, of valuables, wages, etc.). Cooney, Regan's new driver of the faithful Ford Granada, does a great job harassing the Warwick Grey 'S'-type (RBP282E), through the London suburbs of Battersea, as they shove the wages courier out of the car.

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Two villains jump out of the 'S'-type with the wages and the driver keeps driving. As the four minute chase ends, Cooney is pressing the 'S'-type so hard it crashes and the driver is ejected through the windscreen and killed.



Now the gang needs a new getaway driver, and being so impressed by Cooney's driving, the



villains kidnap his bride, Then snatch him up in an Opalescent Silver Blue 'S'-type and force/blackmail him into being their wheelman on their next heist, knocking over a high-stakes

poker game. Cooney is conflicted. Regan and Carter catch on, feed Cooney information on an armoured car opportunity to leak to the gang. They bite.

Cooney drives the Opalescent Silver Grey 'S'-type (NTW886G) with 'Rimbelishers', see Newsletter, Vol. 4, No. 4,) as they blag the armoured car (with Regan and Carter watching). He then leads The Sweeney on a fast chase through London streets and into the Battersea Coach Park. He gets his revenge by diving out of the 'S'-type just before it hits a pile of petrol barrels and explodes with the two villains still inside. Regan and Carter round up the rest of the gang and leaders.



Both opening and closing 'S'-type chases can be seen at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MzYUbyCwxPA> See the full episode at: <https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x4835ox>

Episode 11, Big Spender, first broadcast June 3, 1975, opens with two villains in a grey E-type roadster hijacking a van with £20,000 of cameras.

The trail leads to the Smith brothers where Barry Smith, in a two-tone (dark blue & silver), 'S'-type (DWD606C) threatens the firm's accountant. Carter follows the 'S'-type to a two-story car park, where Barry meets the accountant again, and then leads them to a country club bathing pool (nice shot of the leaper!). What starts out as 'following' becomes a 2+ minute car chase along the Denham Road (A412), Denham, Buckinghamshire, until a front tyre fails on the 'S'-type causing a crash and roll-over. The suitcase with the £10,000 is thrown out and breaks open and in the car is a badly injured Barry Smith.



Confronting Charlie Smith at their car breaker's yard, filmed at a breaker's yard on Old Mill Lane, Cowley, Uxbridge, Middlesex, a cream 'S'-type is seen in a heap of cars. Keeping the pressure on, Regan uncovers their money laundering scheme, pushes them into distrusting/killing gang members, and after a shootout in the breaker's yard, Charlie is crushed by a falling Wolseley 1500.



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See the episode at: <https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x48gz7q>



nearby 'Banger' dirt-track race. A glimpse of a Mk 2 stock car is seen in one scene.

Phil Harrister, a new member of the gang drives an opalescent silver grey 'S'-type (JRY387E) to pick up a newspaper with the robbery in the headline. The gang splits the loot five ways and



Harrister tries to find out who gets the fifth share **and why. The 'S'-type** is seen in another half-dozen scenes as Harrister checks into it.

A young convict, on weekend release and due for parole, becomes a suspect. Regan and Carter look, investigate, prove him innocent, and arrest the gang, including the 'fifth man'.

See the episode at: [https://](https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x3o9uhw)

www.dailymotion.com/video/x3o9uhw

The Sweeney—46-second Opening Segment



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