



Solid Soulful Superstar

(And this isn't even the flagship!)

Story and photos:
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The Ford years—when Ford owned Jaguar, as well as Land Rover, Aston Martin and more—did bring some benefits to both parties. But they also brought suffering. Many saw the S-Type Jaguar as no more than a rebodied Taurus, or the X-Type as a rebodied Contour (though actually based on the European Ford Mondeo, a great car unfamiliar to most US buyers). What's more, the styling was lost in time: the X-Type harkened back to the classic XJ sedan, while the S-Type evoked British saloons of the '50s and '60s. Even the revised XJ—a completely new all-aluminum tour de force—was carefully worked to be almost indistinguishable from its steel predecessor—a violation of working within the benefits and restraints of your materials, first. (The X8 sports car did a good job as a Jag—in that case, it was Aston Martin that had identity issues.)

Jaguar finally relocated its compass in the late '00s, just as Ford announced it would sell off the brand (along with its other once-proud acquisitions). When India's Tata Motors emerged as the buyer, fans hoped the concepts of the past few years would still see the light of day. And they have. First up is the Jaguar XF, a four-door sedan with coupe-like aspirations. This is not their top-of-the-line: that will still be the XJ, which was shown to us at the LA Auto Show in December. There will no confusing the two, nor will there be any mistaking them as brethren.

Enough about where we've been and where we might be headed. Let's talk about where we are, which is in the cockpit of a brand-new Jaguar XF. The car was a recognizable beauty from the moment it was dropped off. The keyless entry was one of the most straightforward we've seen. The door closed with the solid "thunk" of a half-million-dollar Maybach. The engine purred to life at the push of a button.

We paused, as usual, to adjust the mirrors and seat, and to investigate the primary controls. Glad we did, too, as when we started to work the climate and audio, we reached for the big silver knob on the console, instinctively expecting it to have some of the same functions as the BMW iDrive, Audi MMI and so forth. Not the case. In fact, we put the car in reverse, but fortunately had our foot firmly on the



Fit and finish are clean, modern and elegant throughout. The big silver knob (right) is not a media controller, as in so many current brands, but rather the shifter. A surprise at first, this emerges as another point of distinction that helps develop pride of brand. While many brands persist in (or increase) their overuse of chrome, the XF's transition from chrome bars in the air intakes below the headlights to subtle shaped steel is a style delight.

brake. This turns out to be the shift knob for the automatic transmission, which seemed an unwelcome oddity at first, though the good news was that Jaguar has not fallen into the knob flock at large. Ultimately, though, we ended up making fast friends with the shifter. Any case of mistaken identity is only likely once.

We drove the Jaguar XF Premium, which, among those with a naturally aspirated V8, falls at the midpoint between Luxury and Premium with Portfolio Package. (There are also XF Supercharged and XFR—also supercharged—high performance models.) The Premium's 32-valve 5.0-liter V8 delivers 385 horsepower through a 6-speed automatic and claims a 0-to-60 time of 5.5 seconds. Its EPA fuel economy average is 19 mpg. (The supercharged engine delivers 510 hp and a 4.9-second 0-to-60 time.)

The Premium level brings you soft-grain leather, keyless entry, 3-stage heated and cooled front seats, radar-activated blind spot sensors on the side mirrors, a rear camera with path indicators, and bi-xenon headlights. Paint and wheel options are expanded beyond the Luxury model, and the interior features knurled aluminum and burl walnut as standard.



KEEP RIGHT >>



We first decided the knob shifter wasn't half bad when we first noticed that turning off the ignition brings a very quiet whine from the instrument panel, as covers rotate into place over all the vents, while the shift knob retracts to a flush position in the console. Arguably minorly functional, but basically totally unnecessary and totally cool. When it comes to Jaguar badging, we're more fans of the leaper than the growler (which also stares at you from the steering wheel), but we do love the chain-link grille, a bold echo of the '67 Pontiac GTO.

Our XF Premium stickered at \$56,150 base (newer information already has it at \$57,000), but with so many upgrades included, the total was just \$58,875, with \$850 destination and its one option: an \$1875 sound system from Bowers and Wilkins, the master audio engineers at Abbey Road Studios in London.

The base 4.0-liter Luxury model stickers at \$52,000, and—if you favor a suede headliner, deep pile carpeting, ebony veneer, heated steering wheel, rear window shade, 20" wheels and more—the Premium with Portfolio Package stickers at \$61,000. (The Supercharged starts at \$68,000 and the XFR at \$80,000.)

It would be easy to be a sucker for more amenities, but this is a great driver's car, a smooth and aggressive coupe in handy four-door clothing. The Premium model seems to strike the right balance. We enjoyed every minute with this car and could easily keep it indefinitely.

Have you driven a Jaguar... lately? It seems the brand could have every reason to co-opt this old Ford slogan. Jaguar has definitely rediscovered its soul. If you haven't driven one, then when you see the new Jaguar XF in traffic, rest assured its owner has experienced a few things you haven't. Yet. ■

JAGUAR XF LOGBOOK NOTES

- This car has a far more substantial feel than many of its competitors, straight away.
- At first we're skeptical of some interior finishes: the wood seems shiny, the brushed aluminum almost looks plasticky and we wonder whether its black-on-silver imprinted icons will stand the test of time. We soon stop thinking about any of that. They provide a distinctive Jaguar look and feel.
- For the mirror adjustment, you have to hold one button down and operate a toggle with a couple of different fingertips, awkward.
- The touchscreen is good, with a different menu from most. The return button at lower right should probably be at lower left, where it points, and it's hard to touch because it's close to the frame. But the general interface is effective, attractive, a little different.
- Before the week is up, we end up thinking the shift knob is one of the coolest I've-got-a-Jaguar features in the car, of course.
- We often have to hit the start button twice.
- We're big fans of interior center ceiling lights where you don't have to look for the switch, rather the lens is the switch, just press it. Jaguar does this one better, as a trio of lenses are touch-sensitive: sweep your hand once on, once off, one light, two or three, whichever you want. Very elegant.
- Not nuts about the headlight switch, in the dark in particular. It has way more settings for automatic levels and all than for just turning them on and off, our preference.
- When you turn the car off, all air vents rotate closed with flush shields, and the knob for the transmission retracts flush. A low-key machine sound for this is just right.
- All the touches and weights seem perfectly engineered. Everything feels no lighter or heavier than you'd expect. Seats, controls, shifters, wheels... nice job.
- Pushbutton tilt adjustment of the headrests is a great feature everyone should have.

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