

Best of British

Over 1.27 million cars were made in the UK last year, making it easier than ever for car buyers to choose a British-built model.



Jaguar XJ

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There are two 5.0-litre V8 petrol engines in the XJ range, and the naturally aspirated version is formidable enough. But, if you're looking for superior pace, the supercharged Jaguar is the one to go for. It harnesses 502bhp and delivers performance you won't stop thinking about. Even so, most motorists will probably opt for the more humble 3.0-litre diesel. It's far lighter on fuel, but it'll still propel the Warwickshire-made big cat to 60mph in just 6.0 seconds

Refinement is top-notch in the oil-burner, and the low level of road-rumble means you can chat with your rear seat passengers without the need to shout. There's a little bit of diesel rattle at idle, but even when you push the right foot down, there's not much more than a low grunt from the twin exhaust pipes. In fact, it's very difficult to tell it apart from a petrol-engined car once it's cruising.

This level of sophistication doesn't come cut-price though. You'll need to splash out over £50,000 for the basic diesel model, and you'll need to have even deeper pockets if you want one of the V8s.

Price tag: £55,500 - £94,000



Aston Martin Rapide

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At Gaydon in Warwickshire, literally within walking distance of Jaguar, Aston Martin continues to churn out works of automotive art. Its respected 6.0-litre V12, housed inside the magnificent four-seater Rapide, has been tuned for graceful performance rather than unbridled power, and it's hooked-up to a six-speed automatic gearbox - an ideal arrangement for a GT, making for swift, swish travel.

The sound of the gorgeous V12 will be the only sound most people will hear because, even though the side windows are frameless at the top, laminated glass keeps wind noise out at motorway speeds.

Aston has pitched the Rapide against the Bentley Continental GT, so you won't get much change out £150,000. As this is the first four-door Aston Martin, time will only tell how well it holds its value.

Price tag: £149,995

Lotus Evora



Lotus Evora

Few companies have more engineering know-how than Lotus and the Norfolk manufacturer's action-packed Evora confirms that.

Using an aluminium lightweight chassis, hooked up to finely honed suspension, the company has managed to make the latest flagship model relatively inexpensively.

But despite what you may think, the Evora is not a rattling go-kart; it is a hushed and hassle-free cruiser. Road noise is incredibly well masked and all the controls, with the exception of a slightly cumbersome gearbox, work with great accuracy.

You wouldn't call the Evora S cut-price - it's in Porsche 911 territory - but the basic model Evora is something of a good deal, and despite the spine-tingling performance, running costs are quite reasonable. You'll regularly get through pricey sets of tyres and insurance premiums won't be going for a song, but fuel costs shouldn't be a major problem.

Lotus claims that the distinctive way it builds the Evora makes it exceptionally robust. All the hardware is carried on front and rear impact-absorbing sub frames, which should leave the passenger compartment reasonably intact in a crash. But as an added 'belt and braces' measure, Lotus has fitted airbags and stability control to the car. And if you have young children, there are even ISOFIX child seat mountings in the back to keep them safe and secure in their seats.

Price tag: £50,550 - £61,250

Caterham Seven
Roadsport Open

Caterham Seven Roadsport Open

Buyers of the Surrey made Caterham Seven have a choice of engines and power outputs to suit all budgets. The entry-level model sports a 105bhp 1.6-litre engine, which is enough for a car that weighs just 550kg. The most extreme has a massive 260bhp and gives supercar acceleration.

Caterham started up in 1957, but over the years the design has, unsurprisingly, developed. The car offers electrifying thrills with its responsive handling, balance and staggering grip, despite using commonplace components. It's a featherweight, rear-wheel-drive car though, so self-discipline is needed on damp days. The ride is firm, but not uncomfortably so.

A Seven may not be the most rational choice of vehicle for everyday driving, but some enthusiast owners manage to do it. A loyal fan-base and limited production means that the cars hold onto their value like Velcro. Just the steeper priced performance models can decrease in value quicker, because they're wallet-emptying to maintain and have limited demand.

Price tag: £19,995 - £28,850