

Comfort and sophistication personified...

Jaguar XJ 3.0 Diesel Portfolio

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.

Motor manufacturers such as Warwickshire-based Jaguar saw production increase, thanks to the success of the luxury new XJ and XF models.

heartening news in mind it seemed appropriate to visit Jaguar's home in Gaydon, where I was lent the XJ 3.0-litre diesel Portfolio.

Looks-wise, Jaguars are renowned for their elegant sporting lines and the all-new XJ, with its fluid contemporary style, doesn't disappoint. The strong muscular lower half of the car is contrasted with the slim and graceful quality of the roofline, which takes inspiration from the original 1968 XJ saloon. The front of the car is very imposing, with a large grill and an aggressive shark-like face - rather like the new BMW 5-Series. At the rear, the car has a pure sculpted shape, with an absence of unnecessary ornamentation. The sheet metal of the back panel retains its pure form, with a single leaping Jaguar motif making a strong, confident statement. The LED light clusters wrap stylishly over the rear wings, and feature three dramatic red vertical strips. It's all extremely attractive.

Step inside the XJ and the overriding impression is a sense of personal space - a feeling enhanced by the clean, simple form of the leather-wrapped instrument panel sitting low across the vehicle. At the sides of the cabin, a bold architectural wood veneer sweeps forward from the doors to meet at the front of the car, emphasising the XJ's powerful, dynamic character. This linear modern use of wood helps to create a truly welcoming environment.

Behind the wheel, you are greeted by the rotary control of



Thankfully, sales figures were impressive enough for Jaguar's owners, Tata Motors, to confirm its two UK plants will remain open to cope with demand. With that

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the JaguarDrive selector which, on start-up, rises into your palm. Then 3D animations materialise in the virtual instrument cluster and on the central touch-screen. But the weirdest thing is that there is no physical instrument cluster display. Instead, a high-definition screen, which uses beautifully detailed virtual instruments, provides all of the functions performed by traditional dials. It creates a real sense of theatre, but more importantly it works well.

Under the bonnet, the XJ benefits from a powerful and efficient 3.0-litre V6 diesel powertrain, coupled to a six-speed automatic transmission. The lump, boosted by twin turbochargers, propels the car from 0-60mph in just 6.0 secs. It feels every bit as fast behind the wheel as it suggests it is on paper; it's an awesome sensation – reminiscent of taking off in a plane.

But it isn't all about power; on the move in the Midlands-made big cat, the low level of road-rumble means you can chat with your passengers without the need to shout. There's a little bit of diesel rattle at idle but, even when you push your 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-powered car once it's cruising.

Indeed, the all-new XJ makes every journey a special occasion, both for you and your passengers, but this level of sophistication doesn't come cheap. You'll have to splash out over £55,000 for the very basic diesel model, and you'll need to have even deeper pockets if you want to drive the higher up the range XJ Portfolio.

Tim Barnes-Clay

FACTS AND FIGURES

- Max speed: 155 mph
- 0-60 mph: 6.0 seconds
- Combined mpg: 40.1
- Engine: 3.0L V6 twin turbo diesel
- Max. power (bhp): 271 at 4000 rpm
- Max. torque (lb/ft): 443 at 2000 rpm
- CO2: 184 g/km
- Price: £66,515 On the road