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Electric avenue

Jaguar I-Pace
EV 400 First Edition

FIRST
DRIVE

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Unless you've been living on a desert island for the past year, it's been hard to avoid the hype about Jaguar's first all-electric SUV. And now, after millions of pounds developing and testing the car, the I-Pace is now a reality, beating the usual German suspects to market.

Of course, it won't be long before BMW, Mercedes-Benz and Audi are competing fiercely in the electric SUV segment. But for now, Jaguar is driving this emerging new segment on its own. What about Tesla? Well, Jaguar says it isn't too fussed about it, claiming that even though Elon Musk's American firm has spearheaded the way for electric vehicles, its products aren't as opulent. In other words, Jaguar doesn't even recognise Tesla as a true I-Pace opponent.

I-Pace looks better in the metal than in photographs. In short, it's gorgeous. Its pleasing proportions are difficult to capture on film. It sits hunkered down to the ground with a brawny stance with very short overhangs. There is just nothing else in the automotive arena that looks like it.

The I-Pace's flush-floor and absence of internal

combustion engine mean the all-electric SUV is astonishingly practical and jam-packed with convenient stowage solutions. The arm rest between the two front seats conceals a 10-litre cubby-hole, and the centre console houses a couple of USB charging docks for smartphones.

If that's not enough, there are trays that can be pulled out from under the rear seats. Both receptacles are large enough to conceal an iPad or laptop.

The slender A-pillars, big windows and panoramic glass roof, fitted on the EV 400 First Edition model tested here, create an airy cabin with a feeling of roominess everywhere.

Importantly, this isn't just an illusion, there's a respectable amount of space, particularly in the back of the I-Pace. Three adult passengers can fit comfortably with their feet tucked under the front seats. This is because the Jaguar doesn't have a transmission tunnel. There is also good headroom, although, things are a tad tighter when it comes to shoulder room.

The EV 400 First Edition's boot floor is flat as a pancake with a cargo capacity of 559 litres. There's

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verdict

At £81,495, the EV 400 First Edition isn't cheap, especially when compared with Tesla's \$35,000 (£26,355) Model 3 electric car, due next year. But, as we've said, Jaguar doesn't see Tesla as a competitor in the luxury electric SUV sector.

The I-Pace is very firmly a premium car that's priced fittingly. Far more importantly, it's also an electric vehicle that you'll aspire to drive.

Naturally, there will always be a bit of 'range anxiety' with an all-electric car, but with a range of well over 200 miles, the I-Pace should give a typical chauffeur a day's work without the need to stop for a recharge. Some drivers still won't feel comfortable with it. But what won't deter people is the way the Jaguar drives - it's just so quick and handles beautifully. It's also comfy, calm and capacious - all the things that count on a daily basis.

Jaguar has triumphed in not only building the finest electric vehicle yet, it has also produced one of the most exhilarating large cars you can purchase.

data

PRICE as tested	£81,495
WARRANTY	36 months / unlimited miles
INSURANCE	--
VED BAND	A

performance

ENGINE	Dual electric motors, with 90 kWh lithium-ion battery
TRANSMISSION	Single speed auto, AWD
POWER	400 PS
TORQUE	696 Nm
0-62MPH	4.8sec
TOP SPEED	124mph
RANGE	298 miles
CO ₂ EMISSIONS	0g/km

dimension

LENGTH	4,682mm
WIDTH	1,895mm
HEIGHT	1,558mm
WHEELBASE	2,990mm
LOADSPACE	559 litres + 28 litres under bonnet
CHARGING TIME	12hr 36min (100% charge from 7Kw wall box)



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also 28 litres of room where you'd typically find an engine – though that's an ideal place to stash your charging cables.

The rear load space bloats to a van-sized 1,445 litres when the rear seats are folded down, just a little less than the 1,550 litres offered by Audi's conventionally-powered Q5 SUV. That said, the German contender provides 9 litres less luggage space (550 litres) with its rear seats in place.

I-Pace measures 4,682mm long, 1,895mm wide and 1,558mm high. By comparison, the Q5 is shorter at 4,663mm and narrower at 1,893mm, though it's taller at 1,659 mm.

Jump inside, and everything looks a little more familiar. It's different, but it's very much a Jaguar. In First Edition variants the cabin is a mass of glossy wood, sumptuous leather and cool aluminium. Despite the bunch of battery cells under the Jaguar's floor the driving position is exceptional. There's a lot of adjustment in the steering wheel and seat, and the enormous dashboard gives an impression of being inside an old-school long-bonneted Jaguar.

There is a lot of equipment and tech on the First Edition model, too. The limited run flagship is on sale for one year only and encompasses four-zone climate control, a heated steering wheel and windscreens. The car is also fitted with full leather and sits on 20in alloys. The rest of the line-up is named S, SE and HSE spec.

But whichever I-Pace you opt for, all models are

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kitted out with Jaguar's infotainment unit. This consists of a 5in display on the centre console and a 10in touchscreen on the dashboard. It looks good and is generally intuitive to operate. The small shortcut buttons under the screen are the only things to rain on the parade.

They are fiddly and difficult to use on the move. But happily, Apple CarPlay will be joining the list of tech offerings shortly. This means you can avoid using the Touch Pro Duo system entirely if you want to.

The I-Pace gets moving via a quick press of a starter button and by selecting 'D' on the transmission. It glides off without a sound, feeling more and more planted the faster you go. At 2.2 tonnes, the Jaguar is heavy, yet it is agile and handles with real precision. This makes the I-Pace very different to other electric vehicles – meaning it's a game changer for this sector of the automotive industry.

Indeed, what makes the I-Pace truly shine is its body control and steering. It weights up well, and when you turn quickly into a bend, the car stays flat. Then, when it comes to changing course, the I-Pace does so with liveliness, which is partially due to the suspension system that it shares with the Jaguar F-Type. The greater part of the I-Pace's weight is also positioned low down to help cut the SUV's centre of gravity.

However, the Jaguar I-Pace's Achilles' heel is its brakes. The pedal feel is spongy at first and then firms up. Thankfully, the electric car has

regenerative braking, which means you don't need to hit the brakes too much. The moment you remove pressure from the accelerator pedal, the Jaguar slows down until it comes to a total stop.

The I-Pace comes with a wad of safety features, including collision avoidance and driver assistance technology. It also boasts drowsy driver monitoring as well as adaptive cruise control with lane-centring steering assist. The Jaguar houses a clear exit monitor too, which warns you not to open your door if it detects other road-users approaching.

Additionally, when the electric SUV moves at speeds under 12mph, it produces a noise to give cyclists and pedestrians the heads-up that it's driving near them.

With 400PS of power and 696Nm of torque on hand from a standing start, the Jaguar I-Pace is fast, with 0-62mph taking 4.8 seconds. Top speed is 124mph. So, using all the I-Pace's battery power is good fun, but it doesn't last forever - it inevitably needs charging up again.

Jaguar claims the SUV will achieve around 298 miles between charges. Plugged in for 40 minutes using a 100Kw charger, like the one we used in Portugal, you'll get approximately 240 miles. But the issue here is that we don't have any 100kw chargers in Britain.

What we do have are 50kw chargers – and these take 85 minutes to give the same range. But, most I-Pace consumers will charge up at the office or home from a 7Kw wall box – and that takes more than 12 hours to give a full recharge.