Jaguar XJR - Brutally Benign

If the world were full of Jaguar XJR’s there would also be a glut of out-of-work chauffeurs because there is no way that anyone - no matter how wealthy (and at almost £100k for the tested variant you’ll need to be) - is going to buy one of these and then have someone else drive it. It’s a bit special.

Needless to say, DriveWrite found out the hard way about the brutal performance that lies beneath the surface of the benign exterior like a rather angry Kraken that you’ve inadvertently disturbed. My goodness, does this car go. Put the pedal to the carpet and it takes off up the road, all sound and fury, as I discovered seconds later when I glanced down at the digital speedo and saw a number that could have been measured as a warp factor.

It’s deceptive too. The XJR (in short wheelbase form in this instance - the long WB version gives rear seat passengers extra legroom and enhanced rear suspension for that limousine experience) is comfortable - given the sporting underpinnings - and smooth. The danger is that your licence could disappear as fast as this car reaches the vanishing point. Surprisingly, as most of my mileage was local without any long motorway runs, I saw a consistent 25mpg, no doubt aided by the unobtrusive Stop/Start function.

This 2014 model year Jaguar XJ is the latest in a long line of luxurious sports saloons, incorporating enhanced rear cabin luxury features, comfort and in-car technology to create a truly elegant and contemporary luxury modern Jaguar. The XJ is offered with a choice of a 2.0-litre 4-cylinder i4 turbocharged petrol engine, diesel and supercharged petrol 3.0-litre V6 engines and four 5.0-litre V8 petrol engines, one normally aspirated and three supercharged - of which this R-version is one.

Capable of hurtling to the all-important 62mph in just 4.4 seconds and sprinting on to a (limited!) 174mph via an eight-speed automatic - with Jaguar’s Sequential Shift - the XJR will also make an excellent job of pottering about, always ready to select the right gear for the job, making for a great relaxed cruiser. At all times though there is one of those devilish little cartoon imps sitting on your shoulder and whispering encouragingly bad things in your ear.

When operating in auto mode, the transmission can detect the manner in which the car is being driven by monitoring acceleration and braking, cornering forces, throttle and brake pedal activity, road load and kickdown request. On detecting a more enthusiastic driving style, the transmission will automatically make the gearshifts more aggressive and move the shift point higher in the rev range. Alternatively, the driver can just reach for the fingertip controlled paddles and, to use a technical term, give it the beans and make the most of the XJR’s supercharged 5.0L V8’s 550bhp (680lb/ft torque).

Outside, there are a few, albeit subtle, hints as to the dual personality of the XJ. There's a delicate front splitter, an understated rear spoiler, tastefully done side sill extensions and a pair of functional heat vents in the hood, plus of course the red and green R badges. Otherwise all looks normal until you start it up at which point pedestrians will know by the deep burble of the exhaust that something wicked this way comes.

Inside, all is as you would expect, matching the subtlety of the exterior. The growling engine note you hear from outside is reduced to a low, baritone note which only gets guttural when the right foot is extended. Leather and classy features abound. The touchscreen info/nav is a highlight for me along with the usual connectivity and sophisticated climate control. The rising drive selector retains its charm and offers a choice of ways to configure the car along with supplementary buttons. The 2014 XJR features a range of enhanced interior features focussed principally on the rear cabin of the car, which upgrade both the luxury and functionality of the vehicle’s rear environment, resulting in the most accomplished Jaguar luxury saloon yet.

It’s the LWB model that gets the full array of new delights. This includes two individual ‘airline style’ reclining seats which both feature cushion and squab adjustment, three massage programmes – Wave/Rolling, Lumbar and Shoulder – to provide optimum levels of relaxation during long journeys. Depending upon selection there are other items to add to the list of options to truly deliver a limousine experience. That said, the SWB model as tested here is pretty sumptuous too and, as ever, there are options.

Overall, this is a car that is hard to fault. If I want to be a bit negative I could mention that the XJR’s steering can be a tad twitchy and the ride on the 20” Farallon wheels is firm - but that‘s what you get with the essentially tuned suspension. Otherwise, DriveWrite is content.

There you have it. The Jaguar XJR is gorgeous, it's fast, it's comfortable and it's great fun to drive, the handling belying its size. With a dynamic set-up tuned for both performance and comfort, the new XJR brings immense breadth of capability to the prestige automotive segment, creating the ultimate high-performance luxury saloon car.