

Jaguar XJR Supercharged Draws Lots Of Attention

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Published on 5/26/2007



I dunno, maybe it was the classic styling of the 2007 Jaguar XJR Supercharged test car; it just might have been the Radiance Red paint job or perhaps it was the mesh grille, a sure sign this was a performance-minded Jag.

Whatever the case, this was a test vehicle that absolutely stopped people in their tracks.

Normally, that's not really a big surprise. After all, Jaguar's big, formal sedan is a pretty fair piece of eye candy. But the difference this time was the scope of gawkers, ranging from young teens to seniors. Usually, the star-crossed looks for a big Jag come from a more mature crowd, while younger folks barely give it a glance. It was obvious that the mesh grille — and what it signified — had attracted the new audience.

And if you think it got a strong reaction from those outside the vehicle, imagine what it was like inside. This thing is a masterpiece of elegance and power.

First, let's address the reason for that mesh grille and the Supercharged badge on the back end. Just take a peek under that sculpted hood where an Eaton supercharger with twin high-efficiency intercoolers has been attached to the Jag's 4.2-liter V8 engine. Just in case you were wondering, this V8 is a very proficient motor that churns out a very satisfying 300 horsepower without any outside help.

Hitch the supercharger to it, and the production rises to an awesome 400 horses at 6,100 rpm and 413 ft.lbs. of torque at 3,500 rpm, assuring you of a powerful launch off the line and effortless grace at any speed.

In fact, if you wish to drive your XJR like a dragster, it will go from 0 to 60 mph in 5.0 seconds, topping out at an electronically limited 155 mph. Apparently, those youthful onlookers were right: This is one bad-ass luxury sedan.

Granted, few people are going to use a sedan that costs in the mid-80s for street racing, but when you blend that kind of performance with sophistication that only a traditional luxury carmaker like Jaguar can produce, you wind up with something very special.

Drive with a bit of restraint, and the car leaves the line with an unmistakable surge of confidence. It gets up to speed easily and lopes along at the highway limit without ever having the tachometer rise above the 2,000 mark. During this experience, the engine emits just the most subtle and reassuring purr, letting you know the full thrust of those trusty steeds is just a touch away.

Everything else about the car is just what one would expect from Jaguar.

The exterior is made from aluminum alloy that is known for both its high strength and low weight. In fact, the current rendition of the XJ weighs about 180 less than the previous generation. The use of adhesive bonding and self-piercing rivets replaces welding and creates a stronger, stiffer body, something you will appreciate the first time you take the XJ on a winding country road.

Here the car feels as though it was chiseled from a single block of aluminum. It's balanced, the reactions are predictable and it feels surprisingly light on its feet, a pretty impressive feat for a car that weighs in at just 42 pounds shy of two tons.

And you have plenty of help — all hidden neatly in the background. Traction control uses engine torque to assure you of controlled take-offs, and Dynamic Stability Control utilizes engine control and selective braking on all four wheels to make sure you continue to go in the desired direction. Antilock brakes with emergency brake assist see to it that your stops will be quick and controlled.

The exterior shape is the classic sedan, with the long hood and formal rear deck. At 200.4 inches in length and 83 inches in width, it has a very real presence, virtually commanding its share of attention.

The interior retains the true craftsman's touch in the rich burl walnut veneers and soft-grain leather-trimmed seating with dark piping. The stitchwork is first rate, as are all the buttons and switches. The gauges are large, distinctive and easy to read and all sound system and climate controls are a breeze to operate. The basic stereo, by the way, is a 320-watt Alpine system with seven CD changer in back. If I were to change anything, it would be to try and fit that CD changer up front where it would be more convenient.

There is plenty of room fore and aft for up to five passengers. Those in back get their own seat heaters, they also get to utilize the multimedia package that includes dual rear video screens incorporated into the backs of the headrests, a DVD player, rear armrest controls and dual auxiliary input jacks. The cost of the system is \$2,950, which certainly isn't cheap, but this setup is clearly superior to the screens that fold down from the roof and compromise visibility.

After all, when you're at the helm of a Jaguar XJR, being visible is definitely part of the experience.■

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