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## Paul Byrne, The Edmonton Journal

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In the lexicon of motor cars, the word super is reserved for vehicles with exotic looks, wicked power and a six-figure price of admission.

There currently is a small collection of vehicles that warrant the super label, including the Jaguar XKR, Lamborghini Gallardo Superleggera and the Porsche 911 Turbo.

### JAGUAR XKR

Jaguar unleashed the XKE in the early 1960s. It was a sleek, low-slung and powerful sports car that looked like it was breaking the sound barrier even when sitting still. It remains as one of the most beautiful cars of the era and over 40 years later, the look and excitement are back with the new XK.

The aluminum-bodied creation is available in both convertible and coupe with many of the XKE styling cues. The XKR gets you a supercharged V8 that puts out 420 horsepower and a few other go-fast goodies that are worth every extra pence. In spite of all that power, the engine is very smooth and quiet, making the XKR one of the most civilized performance cars on the market. That is, until you put your foot down on the accelerator and 100 km/h arrives in a brisk five seconds accompanied by a gentle, but authoritative, panther-like growl from the quadruple exhaust pipes.

Steering wheel-mounted paddle shifters are linked to a smooth six-speed automatic that make it both fun and safe to run through the gear box during tire sidewall distorting cornering. There is even an induced F-1-like blip during quick downshifts. However, the XKR is more of GT than pure sports car and handling and braking, although impressive, are not in the same league as the others tested. On the other hand, excellent shock dampening and spring ratings give the XKR a remarkably compliant ride that is much easier to live with as a daily driver than the other two.

Interior finish is up to Jaguar's high standards with supple leather, the most comfortable seats of the trio and a smattering of brushed aluminum that adds to the performance image. Controls are easy to reach and gauges are well placed although I found the increments on the speedometer and tachometer too small and not well-spaced, especially for quick checks at speed. Also, the navigation screen is a tad low for my liking.

Other quibbles include a flimsy console mounted parking brake lever and a seat back that rubs against the rear sill when fully extended. Both the XKR and Porsche Turbo claim 2 plus 2 seating based on a rear seat that could not accommodate two gerbils. However, the Jaguar coupe's large boot provides the most stowage space of the trio.

Active safety devices include brake force distribution, and stability and traction control that work in harmony to help you keep the rear-wheel drive XKR right side up on the pavement. Passive safety equipment includes front and side airbags and whiplash reduction. Warranty coverage is four years or 80,000 kilometres along with roadside assistance.

### THE SPECS

Engine: 4.2L Supercharged V8 (Premium Fuel)

Power: 420 hp @ 6,250 r.p.m./413 lb. ft. of torque @ 4,000 r.p.m.

Transmission: Six-speed automatic

Fuel Economy L/100km: 13.1 City/8.7 Highway

Price Base/As Tested: \$117,000/\$127,400

## LAMBORGHINI GALLARDO SUPERLEGGERA

Several months ago, I tested one of the most exotic sport cars that a lot of money can buy, the 2007 Lamborghini Gallardo.

Recently, Lamborghini invited me back to drive the new iteration of the Gallardo -- the Superleggera. I was curious to see what they could have done to improve on an already over the top vehicle that offers style, speed and one of the best engine exhaust sounds in the world.

Needless to say, they found ways to make it go faster, handle and ride better, and they even enhanced the exhaust note.

The Superleggera weighs 100 kg less than the "base" model and the V10 mid-engine now produces 530 horses or raging bulls with 80 per cent of the torque available at 1500 r.p.m.

Helping to get this rocket sled stopped are humungous optional ceramic brakes that are capable of moving your stomach contents upstream while reducing stopping distances by up to one metre. Okay so you may think one metre (39 inches for those who are non-bilingual in measurements) is not much; however, it can be the difference between a narrow miss and a crash. And if you crash in this car it can get very pricy to repair. Worse, you may be without it for weeks or even months.

You will need superior stopping capability because acceleration is mind warping with runs to 100 km/h a tick under four seconds and a top speed of over 300 km/h. The robotized E-gearbox produces lightning fast shifts via steering wheel mounted paddle shifters. It is so much fun that I would slow down to catch the next red light just to run through the gears and listen to the oh so wonderful exhaust sound.

I also tested the six-speed manual version, and as with the Porsche 911, the manual is not as quick and can become tedious to use in stop and go traffic. On the track the Superleggera exhibited rail-like cornering, blistering speed, superior braking and thanks to active suspension and all-wheel drive provides lots of stability making it difficult to get this car sideways -- although it can be done, believe me.

Interior changes include more carbon fibre and polycarbonate side and rear windows that contribute to the Weight Watcher reduction program. Unfortunately, a new gauge cluster includes a speedometer that is virtually unreadable. The carbon fibre seats upholstered in Alcantara, with four-point safety belts, are surprisingly comfortable that make this a great day tripper car with a modicum of luggage space that will easily accommodate dental floss for two.

Safety equipment, particularly the active type, should be more than adequate to keep most out of trouble. In spite of a \$300,000 plus price tag, there is no shortage of buyers with the first production run of 350 sold out. Warranty coverage is in the category if it is important to you then don't put this baby on your wish list.

### THE SPECS

Engine: 5L V10 Mid-engine (Premium Fuel)

Power: 530 hp @ 8000 r.p.m./376 lb.-ft. of torque @ 4250 r.p.m.

Transmission: Six-speed Robotized E-gearbox

Fuel Economy L/100km: 24.8 City/12.4 Highway

Price Base/As Tested: \$300,000/\$320,000

### PORSCHE 911 TURBO

If you are looking for one of the best all weather super sports cars on the planet, then be sure to include the new Porsche 911 Turbo on your shopping list.

The twin-turbocharged horizontally opposed six-cylinder produces 480 horsepower resulting blindingly fast acceleration runs to 100 kph, well under four seconds -- the quickest of the trio. And there is even more, with the optional Sport Chrono Package that generates 505 lb-ft of tree stump pulling torque.

In spite of all this power, it is relatively easy to drive fast and the optional active suspension helps the Turbo stick to most road surfaces with a crazy glue tenacity enabling drivers to explore the outer limits of the car and their nerve. The optional five-speed

Tiptronic S transmission is the better choice for ease of use and is actually faster than the manual in spite of the additional weight. Stopping distances are close to the trio-leading Lamborghini and add to driver confidence when you begin approaching the upper reaches of the sound barrier for the Turbo.

Interior space is basic and functional. The optional adaptive sports seats provide excellent support for performance driving and are comfortable for long sojourns. The "Speed Yellow" seat belts matched the exterior paint of my car and definitely brightened up an otherwise drab interior. Gauges are where they need to be and are very legible, even during high-speed manoeuvring. To call the patches of leather behind the front seats a rear seat is an oxymoron, although there is room for a small gym bag, tennis rackets and a couple of bottles of your favourite libation.

Safety is a major feature of the 911, starting with a reinforced body shell that includes a steel bulkhead cross-member and three separate load paths to help absorb the impact from a crash. Front, side and thorax airbags round out the passive safety. Active safety components include Porsche's Stability Management system that makes driving this super car possible for a broad spectrum of driver skills. Warranty coverage is four years/80,000 km for any defect in materials and workmanship.

#### THE SPECS

Engine: 3.6L Turbo-Charged six-cylinder Premium Fuel

Power: 480 hp @ 6,000 r.p.m./460 lb. ft. of torque @ 1,950-5,000 r.p.m.

Transmission: Six-speed manual

Fuel Economy L/100km: 13.3 City/8.5 Highway

Price Base/As Tested: \$170,500/\$196,565

#### SUMMARY

All three super cars offer endless smiles per kilometre and pure driving sensations that almost make the price of admission seem secondary. Of course price does play a part and the Jaguar XKR, at a paltry \$120,000, seems like a bargain and yet offers the most refinement of the trio and the best choice for daily commutes.

Lamborghini has improved the Gallardo, making the Superleggera one of the most desirable super cars in the world. It offers superior performance, intoxicating style, the functionality of all-wheel drive, and the exclusivity of ownership making the Superleggera a true super star. However, as with most superstars you pay the price and, at a tad over \$300,000, you are about to enter the stratosphere of exotic sports cars, that is provided you can find one to purchase.

Porsche continues to improve its venerable 911 series and without question the new Turbo has created the new benchmark. It is very quick, can cut a corner better than Kurt Browning on skates, and gives a driver the confidence to take on whatever the elements or road surfaces offer up.

Driving it fast is relatively easy and depending upon your skill level, the Turbo can take you to a whole new level of driving excitement and pleasure, for a smidge under \$200,000.

Vehicles supplied by Jaguar Edmonton, Lamborghini, and Porsche North America.

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