

Jaguar's diversified Portfolio

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Nothing says luxury like a Jaguar - especially when it's a new, special-edition XJR Portfolio sedan.

The Portfolio is part of Jaguar's XJ series, which includes the XJ8, Vanden Plas, XJR and Super V8 models. Jaguars are gorgeous, but they're not cheap. The XJR Portfolio goes for \$114,000.

You'll find everything you've ever wanted behind the wheel, from a DVD-based satellite navigation system to adaptive cruise control to a heart-pounding 12-speaker, 320-watt Alpine Premium sound system with AM/FM stereo and six-disc CD-changer. Plus, you'll get unprecedented power and performance.

Beneath the hood of the XJR Portfolio is a supercharged 4.2-litre V-8 engine with 400 horsepower and 408 lb-ft of torque. The V8 is strong, refined, and smooth. Goose the throttle and it roars to life. Despite its large size, the sedan can hit 0-100 km in about five seconds.

The ride quality is superb; handling is agile and responsive. At times, though, the steering is a little light. At highway speeds, the cabin is whisper-quiet and easy to carry on a conversation with passengers in the rear.

A six-speed automatic is the only transmission available. (You can manually change gears by moving the gear shifter along the J-shaped gate. The gear numbers are nestled in the middle of the J-gate, which is hard for the driver to read; it would be better if the numbers were positioned on the left side of the J-gate.)

The XJR Portfolio's entire body, including all outer panels, is manufactured from aluminum, which makes it lightweight. Its body is designed exquisitely; it looks stately and sophisticated, yet sporty.

From all directions, the XJR Portfolio has Jaguar's unmistakable look along with several unique eye-catching details to distinguish it from other members of the XJ family. Hefty 20-inch Callisto wheels with a buff polish finish are a conversation piece, as are the sculpted-aluminum side power vents (similar to those on the Land Rover Range Rover). A chrome-finished exhaust system and a small XJR rear emblem are also attractive touches.

Head on, a simple, elegant mesh grille is flanked by four headlights above a deep front air intake. The leaping feline completes Jaguar's unmistakable front end. It's securely fastened to prevent thieves from walking away with a memento. (I know it's tempting -- I had a close call when I stepped out of the car briefly and returned to find the feline pointed in the wrong direction. Luckily, it sprang back to its correct position with a simple touch.)

The interior echoes the exterior. All materials, including hand-crafted burl walnut, aluminum accents and soft-grain leather seats, are top quality. Door sills in chrome add sophistication to the cabin.

With 16-way, power-adjustable heated seats and power-adjustable pedals, it's pretty hard to be uncomfortable in the driver's seat. Once you find your favourite setting, you can store it in one of the three memory positions so you don't have to fiddle with dozens of buttons every time you take the wheel.

Interior space is generous, both front and rear. The rear seats offer excellent leg- and headroom. While the rear headrests make it cozy for those travelling in the back, they hamper rear visibility.

An electric rear sunblind and rear side-window sun blinds offer some privacy as well as protection from the sun's rays.

The centre console has a seven-inch, colour touch-screen with DVD-based satellite navigation system.

Many buttons and gauges surround the screen, except for audio buttons. But you can tune the radio several ways - by using the steering-wheel controls, the touch screen or your voice. The voice-activated system controls many items, including audio and climate.

At night, the interior gauges illuminate in green, which is pleasing to the eyes.

This big, long vehicle can be hard to park in crowded city streets. While it can't park itself, as is the case with the Lexus LS460, front and reverse parking controls help simplify the task. The Jaguar systems sense obstacles in the front and rear. The front system, however, is a little too sensitive for my tastes. Pedestrians crossing in front of the vehicle trigger the alarm constantly, but there's a button to deactivate the system.

Other innovative features include adaptive cruise control. Just set the cruise control and radar technology monitors the traffic ahead and applies the brake or throttle when needed to maintain a safe distance. Bluetooth wireless technology for mobile phones is also standard so you can keep your hands on the wheel at all times.

There's no need to reach for the wipers when it's pouring, either - rain-sensing windshield wipers start at the first drop.

A multimedia package is great for back passengers: a DVD entertainment system, two 6.5-inch rear video screens in the back of each front headrest, and rear armrest controls with auxiliary input jacks.

The car has a long list of standard safety features including anti-lock brakes, emergency brake assist, electronic traction control, dynamic stability control, frontal airbags, side curtain airbags, an anti-whiplash mechanism in the front seats, and rear child-seat attachment points.

It also has a load-levelling air suspension with automatically adjusting shock absorbers that immediately adjust the car's damping characteristics, from firm to soft, depending on the driving conditions. Individual tire pressure is always monitored, even on the spare tire.

This sedan is a beautiful, contemporary, fast car with unique features that'll turn heads in a heartbeat.

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2007 JAGUAR XJR PORTFOLIO

Type: Premium large sedan

Base Price: \$114,000

Engine: 4.8-litre, DOHC, V-8

Transmission: Six-speed automatic

Drive: Rear-drive

Horsepower/Torque

400 hp/408 lb-ft

Fuel Economy

(litres/100 km)

13.9 city/9.1 highway; premium gas

Alternatives: BMW 7-Series, Audi A8, Mercedes-Benz S-Class, Lexus LS460

Like

Powerful engine

Refined ride

Luxurious interior

Exterior touches such as sculpted-aluminum side power vents

Don't like

Front park alarm

Large rear headrests hamper visibility

J-gate