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2002 Jaguar XJR



All Trims

MSRP:
\$71,830

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2002 JAGUAR XJR EXPERT REVIEW: NEW CAR TEST DRIVE

New Car Test Drive [Autoblog](#)

Introduction **Cat quick, cat soft, cat beautiful.**

Lineup **Introduction**

Walkaround Beauty may be the ultimate luxury. In an age when even entry-level automobiles are increasingly comfortable and refined, when even compact pickups come with power everything, what remains to distinguish a truly luxurious motorcar?

Interior That's a question a Jaguar owner never has to ask.

Driving Impression A Jaguar is sculpture that moves. It is a finely engineered, but that's expected of a car north of 50 large. A Jaguar is far more than fine engineering: It is slinky, shapely, tastefully bejeweled and endlessly beguiling. And its beauty is more than skin deep, extending into its elegant, fine interior.

Summary All this beauty is backed up by muscular powerplants and finely tuned suspension that provide a smooth, luxurious ride with surprising agility and Gibraltar stability.

Model Tested

Lineup

Jaguar's XJ Series includes six models. XJ8, XJ Sport, and Vanden Plas are powered by a 4.0-liter twin-cam V8 rated at 290 horsepower. XJR, XJR100, and Super V8 models get a supercharged version of the same engine rated at 370 horsepower.

XJ8 (\$56,330) comes with nearly every luxury item known.

Vanden Plas (\$68,330) rides on an extended wheelbase for increased rear-seat legroom. It trimmed in elegant Autolux leather and inlaid walnut burl. Heated mirrors, heated seats, traditional British picnic trays, and a six-disc CD changer contribute to interior ambiance.

XJR (\$71,830) comes with a supercharged and intercooled version of Jaguar's AJ-V8. To support its increased performance, the XJR comes with a firmer version of Jaguar's Computer Active Technology Suspension (CATS) plus sticky P255/40ZR-18 Pirelli P-Zero tires, and special sport seats. For 2002, the DVD navigation system comes standard on the XJR.

Three variations are new for 2002.

The Super V8 (\$79,330) is a supercharged Vanden Plas; it combines the long wheelbase and interior luxury of the Vanden Plas with the supercharged engine and tighter suspension of the XJR.

The XJ Sport (\$59,330) shares its shorter wheelbase and naturally aspirated (i.e., non-supercharged) engine with the XJ8, but borrows the XJR's sport seats and more aggressive suspension and tire package.

The limited-edition XJR100 adds 19-inch BBS modular wheels and Brembo brakes with cross-drilled rotors to the standard XJR's qualifications. Special Anthracite paint unique appearance, offset by charcoal leather with red stitching. The XJR100 is named for the 100th anniversary of the birth of Jaguar founder Sir William Lyons. Only 240 examples will be sold in all of North America.

Walkaround

These are beautiful cars. Their soft lines are uniquely Jaguar, stately without being stuffy. The XJ continues a design theme set back in the 1960s. Jaguar tried horizontal, contemporary-looking headlights in the 1980s, but they were so universally assailed that the company returned to the round lights that are critical to the car's overall look. The current design still looks good and has held up amazingly well. The Vanden Plas is distinguished by lovely fluted chrome trim on the trunk lid and grille surround.

Outside door handles (chrome on our Vanden Plas) can be hard to grab when in a hurry and can snap away from your grip.

XJ8 and XJR ride on a 113-inch wheelbase. Vanden Plas and Super V8 share an extended wheelbase of 117.9 inches. You can spot the long-wheelbase versions by their longer rear doors. Long-wheelbase models offer more rear-seat passenger space, but identically sized trunks (or should we call them boots?).

Interior

Jaguar's uniqueness is especially evident inside. Slipping in is like strolling into an English gentleman's club, with yards of supple leather; luxurious deep-pile carpeting; and polished wood on the doors, instrument panel and steering wheel.

The leather is outstanding, light, creamy leather in our Vanden Plas, and the wood trim is beautiful. The steering is handsomely trimmed in wood and leather and the leather surround for the shifter is a much more elegant solution than wood or metal. The cabin includes one of the best clocks I've ever seen, elegant and straightforward. Instruments are handsome, unadorned gauges, simple and understated, in keeping with the elegant mood, and easy to read.

The stereo and climate controls are nicely designed with big knobs for volume and fan speeds. There are a lot of audio and climate controls, so it takes a little time to learn them. However, they are logical and well-designed and become relatively easy to find and operate even when the driving gets busy. It's the same way with the window controls, which are mercifully located on the door.

Memory functions automatically adjust the driver's seat, steering wheel and outside mirror. The driver's seat moves back when Park is engaged for easy exit. It moves forward to its previous position when the ignition is turned on. A cup holder pops out from the console, but drinks tend to get in the way when shifting. Not everything is perfect in the XJ, however. Plastic water bottles fly off the cup holder in corners. Also, the cup holder pops open when the center console is slammed shut.

The Vanden Plas, with its longer wheelbase, offers a huge rear compartment. Legroom is expansive, providing nearly five inches of additional space over the standard XJ8 (39.2 vs. 34.3 inches). Headroom is just as generous as legroom. The rear seat in this sedan is not a secondary seating area; it coddles its occupants with many of the luxury functions found in the front seat. Seat heaters are provided. The bench seat has two depressed seating areas, but a third person would be comfortable in the middle. Traditional British picnic tables (like airline tray tables, only much nicer) fold down from the front seatbacks. Two rocker switches, mounted in a pod to the left of the seat, allow rear-seat passengers to move the front-passenger seat fore and aft and adjust the angle of the seat back, handy when the chauffeur is busy driving or when front-seat passengers won't cooperate or can't find the controls. Vanden Plas provides slightly more headroom in front, as well.

All models have the same size trunk. It's a good boot, but not as large as the trunks in the BMW and Mercedes-Benz.

Driving Impression

Jaguar's XJ cars are fast, stable, and surprisingly nimble. They glide along smoothly, making their owners feel like a million bucks.

Throttle response is instantaneous from the standard XJ8's 290-horsepower V8 engine. On dry pavement, with the traction control turned off, the XJ8 will light its rear tires and deliver startling acceleration performance. Jaguar says the XJ8 can accelerate from 0 to 60 mph in 6.9 seconds, an impressive feat given its size and weight. Under the bonnet is Jaguar's 4.0-liter V8 with double overhead-cams and four valves per cylinder. Called the AJ-V8, it produces 290 horsepower at 6100 rpm and 290 pounds-feet of torque at 4250 rpm.

Likewise, the big Vanden Plas is fast traffic. Punch it at highway speeds and you're past all those lesser automobiles. We were surprised how well this longer wheelbase model handled on narrow, crowned roads in Virginia's Albemarle County. Handling is crisp and well controlled, even in vigorous transient maneuvers. Shocks automatically get firmer as through the corners. The Vanden Plas comes with Jaguar's Computer Active Technology Suspension, or CATS. It sounds like something from a James Bond movie, but it works great. Essentially, CATS is a two-stage adaptive ride control system that automatically adjusts the shock absorbers for road conditions and the driver's demands. Handling of the Vanden Plas comes with a choice of 16- and 17-inch tires on special alloy wheels.

Jaguar's five-speed automatic transmission is silky smooth, even at full throttle. You can almost feel the transmission signaling the engine to reduce power slightly because a shift is coming. There's a nearly imperceptible pause as the gear is changed, then the surge ahead continues. The five-speed automatic adapts electronically to varying driving conditions. It senses whether the driver is cruising the Interstate, hotfooting down a back road, or climbing a long grade, and it varies shift points accordingly for optimum power and efficiency. The driver may select Standard or Sport modes: The standard PRNDL pattern can be used, or shifts can be made manually by moving the stick to a separate gate on the left. This can be entertaining at times, but almost seems superfluous with a transmission that does such a great job of shifting on its own. The manual operation is electronically controlled to prevent downshifting at an inappropriate speed. The Jaguar transmission even compensates for aging by adjusting shift quality based on any slippage it detects.

Automatic Stability Control is standard on all Jaguars. ASC operates at all speeds, easing back on engine power to reduce wheel spin on slippery roads. If a rear wheel spin, the anti-lock brake (ABS) sensor signals a computer, which then reduces the throttle opening, retards the ignition timing or cuts fuel to the cylinders. Jaguar's traction control system includes all ASC functions plus brake intervention. Both types of traction control can be switched off. The brakes work well on the XJ models and are easy to modulate.

The front suspension on the XJ Series is independent, with unequal-length upper and lower wishbones, coil springs, shocks and an anti-roll bar. Lower wishbones are used at the rear with the drive shafts acting as upper links, a setup Jaguar has favored since 1961. These components are arranged to discourage lift while braking and squat while accelerating. Variable-ratio rack-and-pinion power steering is speed-sensitive.

XJR, XJR100, and Super 8 models are transformed by the supercharged engine, and make the XJ8 seem sedate by comparison. The belt-driven blower is nestled between 90-degree cylinder banks, forcefully pumping air to the intake system. Intercoolers chill the air to increase its density and, thus, its oxygen content: Call it O₂ concentrate. The upshot is powerful and immediate throttle response, and the setup inflates the XJR's tor.

Summary

Jaguar's XJ Series boasts some of the finest cars built today. Ford's involvement has undoubtedly contributed to that achievement. The old quality bugbear is just a memory now.

The XJ models are Jaguar's largest sedans, and compete against the Audi A8, BMW 7 Series, Mercedes-Benz S-Class, Infiniti Q45, and Lexus LS 430. Yet in many ways a Jaguar has no competition at all.

Jaguar's XJ8 provides a driving experience that's distinctive from those of the German and Japanese luxury cars. Mercedes-Benz and BMW share a ride that is more on the firm side and generally feel tight and buttoned up. Lexus and Infiniti offer a softer ride and a more relaxed atmosphere. The XJ8 is wonderfully comfortable with an elegant feel. BMW and Mercedes and the rest really can only be compared with the XJ8 in terms of price, because the Jaguar offers something altogether different.

Vanden Plas offers the ultimate in luxury and is a wonderful automobile.

Special tuning and greatly increased horsepower transform the XJR into a high-performance sedan.

Model Lineup

XJ8 (\$56,330); XJ Sport (\$59,330); Vanden Plas (\$68,330); Super V8 (\$79,330); XJR (\$71,830); XJR100.

Assembled In

Coventry, England.

Options As Tested

Model Tested

Vanden Plas (\$68,330).