

CLASSIC DRIVER

Jaguar XJ at Goodwood Moving Motor Show 2010



Early Thursday morning at Goodwood, one day before the start of the Festival of Speed, and the atmosphere at the Moving Motor Show is electric. As motor shows go, this seems so much more exciting than the usual acres of static displays. We are about to drive the new Jaguar XJ 5-litre Premium Luxury saloon, the petrol-powered V8 producing 385bhp.

All the leading manufacturers have set up impressive pavilions beside the hillclimb course in front of **Goodwood House** and, after checking in at the **Jaguar** base, we walk over to the centre of action near the startline.

A wide, temporary roadway has been set up inside an enormously long tent on the grass alongside the startline. Inside this tent, there's a real buzz as guests and staff mill around and cars file slowly down the roadway towards the test route. Only the professional drivers are allowed to drive here, stopping just outside to let the guests take over for the test drive.

Jaguar's booth here is elegantly set up, with an early **E-type** on display to remind us of the heritage behind the new models. Within a few minutes, a new **XJ** glides up and I am introduced to professional driver, **Carl Jones**, my mentor and guide that morning. We follow the formal routine even though no introduction is strictly necessary as, back in the early 1990s, **Carl** and I both raced for the same team.



The test run begins immediately – we weave slowly out of the tent and follow the road through the trees to stop at the startline of **Goodwood's** famous hillclimb course. As **Carl** sets up the video to record the action, I familiarise myself with the controls, select all the sporting settings and prepare myself to go. For anyone who has never done this before, there is nothing to worry about because the firm recommendation is to drive at normal road speeds. Any attempt to break the hill record is strictly forbidden. The idea is for guests to try the cars in a privileged setting and those who wish to cruise up at a gentle 30mph are very welcome.

We went rather quicker than that, I must admit, and at the first corner I was instantly surprised by the sports car feel of the steering and handling. Having driven examples of almost every **Jaguar** saloon produced over the past 60 years, I am well aware that they have always had a certain sporting character but this new **XJ** is in an entirely different league. It's a big, luxurious saloon but as soon as you attack a corner at speed it

suddenly feels small, agile, predictably poised and very quick.

Put your foot down and there's a great surge as the tremendous torque from the V8 takes effect. The tail moves out a tiny fraction but there's nothing to frighten the horses. It's all perfectly smooth and civilised as the traction is astonishingly good, the lightweight bodyshell is extremely stiff and the suspension has been very well set up for enthusiastic driving.



The old **Jaguar** ideals of grace, space and pace have never been better expressed than in this new **XJ**, which now launches itself along the straight in front of **Goodwood House** at a remarkable rate. There is a supercharged 510bhp version of the new **XJ** but this supposedly more modest, normally aspirated model is an extremely fast car. As the revs rise rapidly, I change up a couple of times on the paddleshift before braking and changing down again for the tricky, unsighted lefthander at Molecomb. In a fast car like this, if like me you prefer to remain on the road it's necessary to brake before you see this corner. You need to know the road here.

As the **XJ** presses on up the hill, through the several very fast, blind corners to the top, I keep remarking on how great the steering feels. There are plenty of well-respected sports cars that are not up to this standard of sporting response at the wheel. The road test reports have praised the new **Jaguar** in this respect but I hadn't realised quite how pleasing it is to drive. Unlike some **Jaguars** of the distant past, I can't really fault this new **XJ** and the vital point here is that I don't want to find fault with it. Within one minute on that hill, the car had won me over. For anybody who really appreciates a first class sports saloon car, this **XJ** fits the bill.



Having got to the top, the video is stopped. Looking at it later, it makes a nice, personal souvenir for me but as it simply shows my ugly mug, talking away about how nice the steering is, I suspect that the editor will agree with me: it would be cruel and pointless to inflict it on you here.

From the top, the 3.5-mile test route continues at a much reduced pace along a new, single-track private drive through the **Goodwood** estate, meandering back down through the shrubbery and trees and across a golf course back to the start. On the way down, you can appreciate that this sports car also doubles as a very smooth, quiet luxury saloon.

Should you ever be lucky enough to be invited to a future **Goodwood Moving Motor Show** test drive, my advice would be to snap it up. The experience is slightly surreal but you do get a chance – if you're an invited guest of a manufacturer – to drive the car properly. There was an unfortunate incident this year, admittedly, when a young professional driver in another make of car apparently suffered an epileptic fit. A couple of pedestrians were hurt and considerable damage was done but this was a freakish mishap. It could

have happened anywhere and I hope very much that it will not cast a cloud over the future of a very promising new motor show concept.

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