

CLASSIC DRIVER

Driven: Jaguar XJR-15



So THIS is what it's like to drive at Le Mans? Well, sort of. The XJR-15 is that strange combination of completely mad performance coupled with everyday niceties such as air-con and an indicator stalk. Fast? Yes. Suitable for driving on the public road? Why not... we just have.

Do not confuse this mid-engined Jaguar of the early 1990s with the XJ220 of the same period. Both wear the Jaguar badge and both are products of Tom Walkinshaw Racing (TWR). But where the massive-looking, turbo-V6-powered XJ220 was always intended to be a road car, the only slightly smaller XJR-15 - with its 6.0-litre naturally aspirated V12 and carbonfibre tub - is just a few steps away from the TWR Group C XJR-9. This was the car that won the 1990 Le Mans 24 Hours.

Ironically, it was the XJ220 rather than the XJR-15 that was to see significant action at Le Mans, while the latter starred in the three-race 1991 Jaguar Sport Intercontinental Challenge which supported Grand Prix races at Monaco, Silverstone and Spa. Around half of the 50 or so cars built were road versions, and just a handful actually registered.

This example, owned by [Classic Driver dealer Rod Leach](#), who has had the car since 2008, is one. It's hardly completed more than 500 road miles in its life and is fresh out of a period of painstaking engineering development work by Don Law Racing. The British marque/model experts were instructed to: "Go right the way through every aspect, and do whatever is necessary to make it into a usable road car."





Don, Justin and the boys have certainly done that.

To slip into the seat, first one has to negotiate a fair distance of carbonfibre sill. This is the tub that provides such stiffness, security and solidity – a variation served the XJR-9 well enough.

Once in the tightish racing seat, it's an impressive view ahead. You sit very close to your passenger, both seats slightly angled inwards so your feet seem to touch. The right-hand-side gear lever is close to the small steering wheel which – for once – has a 'flattened' lower section of necessity, rather than design.

Racing belts done up, the essential Peltor headset connected and working, it's time to fire up the big V12 and lay waste to some Staffordshire A-roads, first with Justin Law behind the wheel.

I am sure Classic Driver readers will be familiar with Justin Law's skills. He's often set FTD at the Goodwood Festival of Speed in a Group C Jaguar, and is a regular at the Revival, normally driving a Mk2 or the Lister-Costin Jaguar coupé. He is very, very quick.







So the deal was that Justin would warm the car up, show me its performance and how to get the best out of it. Which he did. Oh yes, he did.

It's mightily fast – obviously – but the overriding impression is of total solidity (the engine is bolted directly to the tub), a magnificently smooth engine and a ride that balances the need to accommodate rough British roads, yet stay flat in corners.

Adopting the 'it's a car' approach, when my turn came I just snuck the lever into first and set off. It's a five-speed all-synchro 'box (as opposed to the 6-speed straight-cut one in the competition cars), another part of the £55k premium for the road version, over and above the XJR-15's £600,000 price tag.

The clutch is fine - though I do confess to one stall, just as we were back at base. Keeping the revs in the lower half of the range on a wet, greasy day it's easy to drive. The view ahead is good, and who is going to try and overtake you, anyway? The steering is deliciously direct, though the brakes need a bit of warming-up, revealing their racing roots.

I've never driven one, but I am sort of assuming the experience is similar to a McLaren F1. Both have carbonfibre chassis with 6.0-litre V12s. And each carries bodywork styled by Peter Stevens. It's far more sophisticated than a [Roush-tuned Ford GT](#), and totally different from the Law family (650bhp) XJ220 that I tried later.

In all honesty, driving the XJR-15 any distance is likely to be a challenge. 'At Le Mans': yes. 'To Le Mans': well, it would take a brave man and a very accommodating passenger. But with the work that Don Law Racing has carried out to bring the car *just* back into the envelope of usability, it's a car like few others.

Useful links

Cars from Rod Leach's Nostalgia [in the Classic Driver Marketplace](#)


Don Law Racing, the worldwide experts for race preparation and work on Jaguar Group C, XJ220 and XJR-15 motor cars: www.donlawracing.com

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