

# A TALE OF TWO KITTIES

Self-confessed Jaguar fancier, Clive White, goes back to the future of the big-cat sports saloon



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**I**t hardly seems possible that the Jaguar XF has been with us since 2008. There's been a subtle 'mid-life' refresh while the addition of a smaller diesel engine has created a new range of models and potential buyers. The 2013-enhanced saloons and brand-new Sportbrake are in the shops in September.

Yet, while XF is vaunted as an extremely successful model for Jaguar, it's hardly a common sight. Elegant – dramatic, even –

as the XF's coupé-like styling is, from certain angles or at a distance I have mistaken it for something else. Not a problem I've ever suffered with any other Jag, but probably it's a symptom of losing some individuality in pursuit of attracting customers from competitors.

However, XF's apparent scarcity serves to make it rather more exclusive than its more common rivals, which helps to keep the Jaguar a bit more special.

#### CABIN COMFORT

Talking of being a bit special, XF's much-publicised interior continues to impress. Every drive starts with a bit of a show. You keylessly unlock and settle into the seat. The 'heartbeat' start button then pulses temptingly. Give it a prod and simultaneously the rotary gear-selector wheel rises from the centre console, fascia air vents rotate to their open position and the steering column resumes its last user's

preferred adjustment. Oh, and the engine starts. Very swish and a delight to behold.

The high centre console gives a 'separate-cockpit' feel and the (heated and cooled) electrically-adjustable front seats are very comfortable. From here you'll appreciate your surroundings – real leather padded dash top and door cappings, the Ivory double stitching smartly contrasting with our Portfolio's Warm Charcoal leather. Real wood-veneer inserts for the fascia, central

compartment covers and upper door panels, and real aluminium cladding the fascia's front face and door-handle surrounds add a further touch of class.

Sadly, disillusionment dawned in the form of chromed real plastic door handles – even the lowly (by comparison) X-Type's are chromed metal, and feel much more substantial.

For a relatively large car, rear legroom can only be described as adequate, especially

with front seat-adjustment extended and, predictably, taller occupants may find the sloping coupé roofline restricts headroom, too. Otherwise, the cabin's width means three can perch comfortably, if cosily.

The test car's Bowers & Wilkins 1,200W, 17-speaker sound system provided exceptionally rich and well defined 'concert-hall' sound quality. For hi-fi buffs, it's worth noting that 2013 models get Meridian premium sound equipment. >>

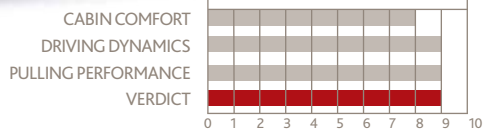




Classy cockpit

## TECHNICAL

### RATINGS



|                              |  |
|------------------------------|--|
| RRP                          | £42,200 OTR  |
| Engine                       | 2,179cc, in-line 4-cyl, common-rail turbodiesel. Longitudinal                |
| Power                        | 188bhp (kW) @ 3,500rpm   |
| Torque                       | 332lb ft (450Nm) @ 2,000rpm  |
| CO <sub>2</sub>              | 149g/km  |
| Transmission                 | Eight-speed automatic, RWD   |
| Fuel/tank/econ               | Diesel/15.3gal (69.5 litre)/47.8mpg solo/25.9mpg towing 1,480kg              |
| Kerbweight                   | 1,745kg (85% = 1,483kg)  |
| Gross vehicle weight         | 2,320kg  |
| Gross train weight           | 4,170kg  |
| Noseweight limit             | 75kg   |
| Towing equipment             | Factory-fit towbar and electrics, £750                                       |
| Spare wheel                  | Inflation kit (alloy space saver optional)                                   |
| Insurance                    | Group 39   |
| Jaguar XF Diesel model-range | £29,940 (2.2 Diesel SE 161bhp) to £49,005 (3.0 V6 Diesel S Portfolio 273bhp) |

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### INFORMATION

#### MAKING ITS MARK, TOO

You may have noticed the bonnet and front grille of a Jaguar Mk2 in the main photo. Although the XF's hardly compact, it shares a common bond with the Mk2 in that they were both landmark cars for Jaguar.

The Mk1, on which it's based, was Jaguar's first monocoque (chassisless) car. Paring back the Mk1's over-engineered sheet metal, Jaguar founder William Lyons took the earlier car's profile and gave it greater glass area, more delicate window frames and gorgeous detailing. With a range of XK 6-cylinder engines, Mk2 became the definitive sports saloon. Along with his later triumph, the exquisite 1968 XJ6, these two cars evoked the style and image that Jaguar saloons have attempted to emulate and modernise ever since. The last XJ6, (1999) S-Type and X-Type were the last saloons to display those traditional curves and contours. XF broke the mould.

For many, however, Mk2 was aspirational. It could be respectable or blousy, sedate or jaunty, tasteful or flash. A 2.4-litre riding on steel wheels with chrome hubcaps and trims might waft the local bank manager from work to leafy, middle-class suburbia. A 3.4 would signal to the neighbours that their local, brash entrepreneurial type had arrived while a 3.8 would be the vehicle of choice if you were looking for class mixed with high-end performance. The police used them, too.

The Mk2 here belongs to magazine designer, Peter McCreary. It's a 1967 powered by a 3.8-litre motor.

Mk2 or XF? I'd like both, please.



Tower of strength

As you might expect, this top-of-the-range trim level provides for nearly every whim, though there are further options. The £700 TV tuner was nice for a brief period, but its battery-saving auto shut-down made it seem a bit pointless. Maybe it is possible to view for longer without the engine running, but I didn't discover how.

There's a voluminous boot, extendable by folding the rear seats, but the cavern disappears under the deep, fixed rear parcels shelf, enforcing much back-bending to access its farthest reaches.

#### DRIVING DYNAMICS

For a car with so much equipment and numerous facilities, the low button count may surprise. Primary lighting and wiper functions are on the column stalks with basic climate and audio operations accessed via the few fascia buttons, while phone, cruise and limited audio controls reside on the steering wheel. The colour touchscreen is the control centre for pretty much everything else.

Though the four-cylinder diesel can't muster quite the refinement of its V6 cousins, there's nothing to suggest the 2.2 to be in any way inferior. This Portfolio model otherwise matches its 3.0-litre counterpart in every way. The entry-level SE means XF's delights can be had from £29,940 – something of a bargain – and there's a very tasty-looking Sport LE for not too much more. The 2.2 is cheaper to tax and insure, too, and Stop/Start contributes to a claimed 52.3mpg.

In real-life driving I doubt the 2.2 loses too much to the lower-powered of the two V6 diesels. The four-cylinder is lively and willing and works well with the excellent eight-speed auto. Left in 'D' it shifts smoothly and intelligently, though perhaps a little hesitantly on a light throttle. Steering-mounted paddle shifts give instant intervention and provide complete 'manual' shifting in the performance-biased Dynamic Mode.

Part of the joy of driving the XF is its smooth, well-weighted and nicely-g geared steering which combines so seamlessly with its confident handling and compliant ride. It's a collection of beautifully-judged

compromises that gives the XF exceptional balance and poise, and the ability to string together a series of bends with absolute accuracy and confidence.

#### PULLING PERFORMANCE

Worried the 2.2 may lack the grunt to tow? No problem: its 13 seconds to 60mph conceded just 1.6sec to the very quick 271bhp 3.0-litre diesel S XF and 1sec between 30 and 50mph. The 2.2 only betrays its fewer cylinders in these extra-hard-worked circumstances by becoming rather gruff and vocal. On hard surfaces rear drive gives good traction for brisk take-offs and easy hill starts, in conjunction with the electric automatic parking brake.

Once up to cruising speed, the gearbox would slip into 8th gear with the engine turning at just 1,250rpm at 60mph. Unsurprisingly, relatively slight inclines found 7th (1,500rpm) and 6th (1,900rpm) quite readily, but with such subdued engine noise and smooth changes, only the tachometer gave the game away. High-speed stability was exemplary, with only a hint of crosswind buffeting.

While XF is an accomplished motorway cruiser, twistier roads demonstrated its dynamic towing prowess. Precise steering ensured the outfit's accurate placement through bends with the confident handling providing any required adjustability.

Jaguar's engineers' primary consideration when deciding XF's ride settings obviously wasn't towing. But the solo comfort-to-control ratio still shines through with trailer pitching kept well in check while offering a particularly comfortable ride. ■



Good boot space

#### VERDICT

Arguably the best driving car in its class has become easier to own and run. It's still striking and dramatic, outside and in, and offers a lot for the money. Plus, it tows beautifully. What's not to like?