

FIRST
DRIVE

Jaguar S-Type R



HERE'S A DILEMMA. SOME potential S-Type owners said that this model should be more affordable, while others said it could do with a lot more power. "No problem," said Jaguar magnanimously, "we'll give 'em both." Enter a smaller-engined 2.5 V6 (to accompany the existing 3.0 V6), together with a new 4.2-litre V8 developing either a stirring 300bhp or an awesome 400bhp in the case of the supercharged R. We opted to sample the last.

Most people will be more than happy with the smooth, vigorous acceleration and sublime cruising of the 4.2 with "only" 300 horsepower, but for really spectacular performance, the 155mph blown R version is the one to beat. Open the throttle wide and it hurtles towards the horizon at an electrifying rate, emitting a soul-stirring howl and overtaking with consummate ease. (Jaguar claims 0-60mph in 5.3sec – as does BMW for its M5.) It then settles to a long-legged cruise that makes the 70 limit feel like a gentle jog.

The absence of wind hiss and the superbly insulated tyre noise are big contributions here, but credit for the car's overall refinement is also due to the new and beautifully smooth ZF six-speed automatic transmission. This boasts several clever features, including Jaguar's familiar J-gate manual override control.

Completely revised, computer-controlled suspension gives a masterful if firm ride on the 18in alloys with front 40-/rear 35-Series tyres, that can feel thumpy on poorer surfaces. Nevertheless, sporting types will appreciate the car's taut feel when pressing on, even though they may lament

the absence of genuine feel through the fluid and nicely weighted steering.

Big, butch Brembo brakes bring all the fun to a very rapid halt, and the unusual semi-automatic, electrically operated parking brake works well, too.

Another rare (unique?) optional feature of the S-Type is adjustable pedals. These, in conjunction with all the seat and steering wheel electric adjustments, mean that all sizes of driver are catered for and their favourite positions "remembered". Vision is aided by the large door mirrors.

It's a low car to enter and leave, but once you're settled, the shapely seats hold you firmly in place. There's ample legroom and kneeroom for those in the back and, of course, impeccably finished leather, wood and carpet abound. The R also teems with technology, yet there are several items for which you're asked to pay extra, such as a sunroof, rear parking sensors and a heated windscreen. You don't get a divided, fold-down back seat on this model, either.

VERDICT

"It's more like low flying than motoring," said one passenger – which pretty much sums up the S-Type R. A lot of superb engineering lies beyond the sleek and slippery bodywork and is translated into impressive ride and handling to complement that stunning engine and all that power. It's a fine, refined performance car and a credible alternative to the (costlier) German opposition.

AT A GLANCE

considering size, price and rivals

Controls/displays	★★★★○
Handling/steering	★★★★○
Comfort	★★★★○
Space/practicality	★★★★○

THE S-TYPE RANGE

size and type large/executive five-door saloon (premium priced)

trim levels Sport, SE, R

engines petrol: V6 cylinder/2.5 litre/203bhp, V6/3.0/241, V8/4.2/302, V8 supercharged/4.2/400; diesel: none

drive rear-wheel drive, 5-speed manual on 2.5 V6/Sport and 3.0 V6 Sport; 6-speed stepped automatic with manual override on 2.5 V6 SE, 3.0 V6 SE and both 4.2 V8 models

notable features available six-speed auto transmission, computer-activated suspension, xenon headlamps with auto levelling, electrically adjustable pedals, seats (16-way) and steering, voice control of audio, side curtain airbags, satnav and tv, trip computer, electrically operated parking brake

LIKES ...

just knowing how fast it *can* go
finely crafted maple veneers/leather
big-screen satnav/tv (option)
dual-zone climate control
gas struts to raise boot lid

and GRIPES

head restraints mar rear view
poor foot space under front seats
shallow door pockets
limited boot height
space-saver (alloy) spare wheel

VITAL STATISTICS

length x width (<i>inc mirrors</i>)	488x206
front - legroom	87-110
- headroom (<i>no sunroof</i>)	94-103
rear - typical legroom	103
- typical kneeroom	77
- headroom	90
- hiproom	136
load space (<i>all seats in use</i>)	
(litres/cu ft)	380/13.4
load length	94
load width	103
load sill height (<i>inside/outside</i>)	12/68
boot height	39