



Jaguar X-Type



SOME CARS ARE BOUGHT WITH common sense: MPVs, tall-build hatchbacks and diminutive city-cars, for instance. Others are bought with the heart not the head, and the X-Type is one such. The flowing Jaguar contours plus enthusiast-driver appeal make a powerful case for spending more. And it does possess real driver-appeal – unlike the larger S-Type which is endowed more with looks than road manners.

The permanent four-wheel drive set-up ensures that when the V6 engines' power is unleashed, there's no tugging at the helm or untidy wheel scrabble. The steering is quick, precise and ultra-light at low speed, weighting up nicely as the speedo needle rises.

Acceleration in the 2.5 isn't particularly impressive from lower revs, but the engine is always mannerly, free of vibration or complaint, right up to 6500rpm. If you're right foot is clumsy, there's a "thunk" from the driveline, however, and the manual gearchange is workmanlike, rather than "knife through butter".

The automatic option is agreeable on the 3.0 litre especially, with the J-gate selector providing easy manual control; the gearbox's sensitivity more than satisfies when left in D, except when a sudden overtaking opportunity leaves it hesitating about a double downshift. The only other complaint we can level is about some driveline hum, especially prominent at around 3800rpm – too near motorway cruising speed to be tolerable.

The suspension clearly benefits from the

even weight distribution and our 2.5 standard test car had a really compliant ride, yet with impeccable cornering manners, too. The Sport version is stiffer-limbed, yet avoids serious harshness in its pursuit of tauter responses.

Front seat comfort (with our car's electric resetting (a £900 option) pampers most shapes and sizes, except perhaps the very tall. It's the same story in the back with the low-set cushion looking like a Mark I Mondeo's; kneeroom is good but total leg-stretching space unimpressive (compared with a Mondeo Mark III).

Likewise, the boot (which lacks height) is adequate rather than gargantuan; all this is the price one pays for sleek, curvaceous looks.

Although the car is generously endowed with safety and security features, the options list reveals that the invoice price is likely to grow well beyond the list price, once items such as headlamp washers, a sunroof and a folding back seat have been added – even metallic paint costs £500 extra.

VERDICT

Now that Jaguar reliability is on the up and up, the X-Type has what it takes to be seriously considered as an alternative flight of fancy to the likes of the Volvo S60, BMW 3-Series and C-Class Mercedes. It's worth remembering that Subaru and even Skoda offer cheaper, well-built four-wheel drive contenders with more generous features as standard, however – if that's your more down-to-earth reason for considering the Jag.

AT A GLANCE

considering size, price and rivals

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

THE X-TYPE RANGE

size and type upper medium (premium-priced) 4-door saloon

trim levels standard, SE, Sport

engines petrol: V6/2.5 litre/196 bhp, V6/3.0/231 diesel: none

drive four-wheel drive, 5-speed manual; optional 5-speed stepped automatic with torque converter, J-gate manual override

notable features all current versions with permanent 4WD, 18cm central screen for in-car entertainment, satnav and air con control

VITAL STATISTICS (cm)

length x width (inc mirrors)	467x200
front - legroom	88-111
- headroom (no sunroof)(min)	93
rear - typical legroom	99
- typical kneeroom	76
- headroom	92
load space (all seats in use) (litres/cu ft)	417/14.7
load length	100
load width (average)	109
load sill height (inside/outside)	15/69
load height	35-39

LIKES ...

electric lumbar adjuster (opt) spot-on virtually silent tickover
big horn pad and "windtones"
neat dial dimmer/beam trimmer controls
single extra sweep after wash/wipe

and GRIPES

shorter driver's elbow fouls armrest
door bins aren't soft-lined
tilting back seat and armrest extra
only six years' anti-rust warranty
boot lacks height