

2010 Jaguar XFR

By Steve Schutz, MD

Things are different at Jaguar these days. Way different. After years of declining sales and heavy financial losses, the venerable British automaker was sold off to Tata, an Indian conglomerate that owns Tetley tea, among other businesses, and also sells the cheapest new car you can buy, the Nano. (Well, you can't buy one—it could never pass our crash tests—but citizens of India can for about \$2500.) And Tata obviously decided that if you can't beat the Germans and Japanese at the Luxury car game—and Jaguar couldn't—then copy them, or at least benchmark them.

So it's good-bye quirky English interior touches and old world exterior design, and hello sleek modernity (like BMW) and total dedication to quality (like Lexus).

The first “new” Jaguar was the second-generation XK sports car, followed by the XF mid-size sedan introduced last year. The next step was the subject of this review, the XFR high performance luxury sedan, and finally the flagship XJ sedan, arriving in dealerships now.

The XFR is aimed directly at the benchmark BMW M5 sedan, which, as luck would have it, is on a brief hiatus as BMW readies a new version. However, while the M5 is a no-compromise sports sedan conceived for true enthusiasts, the XFR is less edgy with more of an emphasis on luxury, a bit like the Mercedes E63 AMG. Think of it as a gentlemen's (or gentle lady's) express—extremely fast and capable, but comfortably luxurious, too.

The XFR isn't soft, though. Thanks to an all-new five-liter 510HP supercharged direct injection V8 engine, the XFR can move. I drove it extensively in and around Manhattan recently and found it more than able to put obnoxious cabbies in their place. (For the record, the XFR can do zero to sixty MPH in a remarkable 4.3 seconds.)

Yet the suspension, which has been tuned at the Nürburgring race track in Germany—hasn't every luxury car's these days?—was supple enough to absorb the potholes of New York and Long Island without the jarring that made the last generation BMW M5 so off-putting in similar circumstances. According to Car Magazine, the XFR can't quite match the M5 at the limits of cornering adhesion, but I appreciate the XFR's sophistication in the real world.

Certainly the interior's sophisticated. The XFR's modern cabin sports more aluminum than wood, plus there's a novel circular shift knob in the center console that rises when you start the car. Rather than moving a lever to engage reverse, neutral or drive, you twist the knob. It's gimmicky, yes, but it's also original. Naturally, the XFR includes large paddle shifters behind the steering wheel

for manual gear changes.

Style is not without costs, so rear outward visibility for the XFR is not as good as it is in its competitors. And in terms of space, taller passengers seated in the back may find their heads touching the roof. The trunk, however, is quite spacious.

Design-wise, the XFR takes the standard XF and adds numerous exterior design elements that quietly whisper, “I'm fast, elegant and expensive”. As I've written previously, the XF shape has more than

a hint of Lexus GS in it, but the XFR takes that look and Germanifies it (not a word, I know, but you get the point). Gorgeous 20-inch alloys that could have come from an Audi RS6, bodywork mods such as fender flares and hood louvers, and scattered “R” badges all combine to add visual aggressiveness.

As you'd expect, the standard equipment list in the XFR is extensive. Included are the aforementioned 20-inch wheels, front and rear parking sensors, keyless

ignition, sunroof, automatic headlights and dual-zone climate control, leather upholstery, heated 10-way power front seats with driver memory, Bluetooth, sat nav, voice-activated controls, special XFR interior trim pieces, and a high-end Bowers & Wilkins surround-sound stereo with iPod interface and satellite radio. A rearview camera is also included as are heated and cooled front seats, and leather-trimmed dash and door trim. To balance the potent 510HP motor, the XFR has bigger brakes, adaptive suspension, limited-slip rear differential, and stability and traction control. Standard safety features include front-seat side airbags, side curtain airbags, active front head restraints, and a blind-spot warning system.

With a standard feature list like that, the number of options is small—as in three: adaptive cruise control with emergency brake assist, red brake calipers and a windshield heater.

As Jaguar continues to develop cars that move it into the future rather than looking backwards, vehicles like the XFR will be increasingly important. Personally, I liked the old Jaguar with its history, heritage design and wood-everywhere perspective. But the market has spoken, and the future belongs to BMW, Audi and Lexus. Here's to Jaguar for finding a place in that world, and here's to a world with muscular cars like the XFR.

