

# Very inviting...

Wicked cool coupes can make great convertibles, although something is generally lost in the style when the top comes off. Examples include Aston Martin, BMW 6 Series, Audi A5/S5, Porsche 911... and the Jaguar XK. The XK coupe is one great-looking machine. Fortunately, so is the convertible, and sometimes you just really need to let the sun shine in.

The Jaguar XK was launched in 1996, when Ford owned Jaguar, Land Rover and Aston Martin. The early Jaguars and Astons in that era were very close cousins, from which Jaguar probably benefited more than Aston, although it gave Aston Martin a production scale they'd not had before. (This is also a debatable benefit, as

decades of just a handful of handbuilt cars became a thing of the past.) Ford has been busy divesting itself of the Premier Auto Group for the past few years, and Jaguar Land Rover have gone to new ownership under Tata Motors of India. The cars are still built in Coventry, England, however, and they are once again free to follow their own path (as is Aston Martin).

The XK series were the first ever produced by Jaguar with V8 engines, and as such, originally this was the XK8. A supercharged version, the XKR, has been available throughout the run, also. The V8 is no longer news, we guess, so the name is now simply XK (and XKR).

When we heard the XK would be com-

ing to our fleet, we had high expectations, as we had thoroughly enjoyed the XF sedan (see January/February 2010). And of course we wished for an XKR.

The XKR has a 5.0-liter supercharged 32-valve V8 generating 510 hp, accelerating 0-to-60 mph in 4.6 seconds with an electronically limited top speed of 155 mph, while getting 15/22 mpg EPA estimated city/highway mileage. The XKR convertible's base price is \$102,000 (the coupe is \$96,000). The XK's normally aspirated 5.0-liter V8 has 385 hp, 0-to-60 time of 5.3 seconds (5.2 for the coupe), the same top speed and 16/22 EPA ratings. The XK convertible's current base price is \$89,000 (and the coupe \$83,000).

The 5.0-liter V8 is n all-new AJ-V8 Gen III direct-injection engine promising significant improvements in power and torque, with no compromise in fuel economy or emissions. All four models (XK/XKR coupe/convertible) have a 6-speed automatic; sadly, no stick. The supercharged XKR has a 9.5:1 compression ratio, while the XK is 11.5:1. They all weigh in at over two tons, ranging from 4575 lbs for the XK coupe to 4817 for the XKR convertible; the convertible adds about 100 pounds, and the supercharger about 150.

Our test XK convertible arrived with a prior sticker base of \$88,150, and the only add-ons were a burl walnut veneer at no charge, an HD radio at \$300, and destination charges of \$850, for a total of \$89,300. (With the new base price, that would now just top \$90k.)

So we were about to drive the car that has 75% the horsepower of an XKR, though is 87% as quick to 60 mph, yet is 87% the cost of an XKR. Might we be, er, disappointed?

KEEP RIGHT >>



STORY AND PHOTOS BY JOE SAGE

## XK CONVERTIBLE LOGBOOK

- First day noted "unless this is the R and we don't know it, we're inclined to say this is all you need, not the R." Just saved \$13k.
- Suspension is very firm in the delivered setting, revealing bumps that aren't even there. Turns out we had Adaptive Dynamics off. On is much better. This system replaces a two-setting system (softer or firmer), automatically adapting to the road and driving habits. Its continuously variable damping benefits comfort, control, handling and grip. And it works great. The seats could use more bolstering, though. That's probably a point for the XKR.
- A bit of a lurch in the gears, at first drive, but again we'll check the various settings.
- As with the XF, we like the steering: does what we want it to, no electronic oddness.
- Shifting from P to R on a very slight driveway incline produces a noticeable "chunk" that's a little disquieting. We don't seem to get it on a dead-flat surface.
- The nose overhangs sufficiently to require plenty of extra driveway curb caution. Suspension easing off the driveway curb is very well done. But watch that nose.
- After just 3-4 miles in the XK, with the top down, on a beautiful spring night, we don't want to stop till we hit Santa Barbara.
- What can you say: we drive all the time, we drive nice cars all the time, but this is the kind of car that makes you not mind that

Logbook (cont'd) >>

## (CONT'D) XK LOGBOOK

you got almost all the way to the PO without your mail and had to go back for it.

- On the 51 freeway, predictably enough, the Lancers and Neons want to race, or show off. Dream on.
- In downtown Phoenix, we get panhandled at corners and get hostility in traffic.
- It has an average fuel economy range meter, just a visual, which we immediately realize we prefer to specific (and often unreliable) numbers, though it has those, too.
- Cornering lights apparently are not dependent on the turn signal, so around the neighborhood they could be annoying if you light up a strolling neighbor, but for the driveway they're nice.
- Top operation was really simple, was in the quick start guide, switch is right overhead, works real easily. Time needed to put the top up: 26 sec beep to beep, waiting for windows to come up; about 16 sec for the top itself, then the windows start. Could save a lot of time if the windows started later finished their last inch or so. About 17.5 sec down, complete, much better.
- Putting the top up a second time, we put the windows up first, and it completes its operation in 20 sec, but ended with the windows down, quicker but defying logic. We entertain ourselves several more times with alternative sequences and times.
- Considering you have to keep your finger on the button for a good 25-30 seconds to raise the top, you have a tendency to put your fingers on the upper windshield frame. Don't do that. You'll get 'em mashed.
- Audio is very good, even with the top down and at highway speed.
- We adjust our freeway style after realizing the cruise control is a speed limiter, not a fixed speed. We're sure it must work both ways but never do succeed it setting both.
- Our other beef besides cruise control is with the radio, which occasionally but not always resets itself to having no preset stations or other settings.
- With the top up and windows open, at about 45 mph, incredible wind noise from the right window.
- Seats are heated and cooled. Would like to try the cooling in August... top-up.
- Turns out the A-pillar and windshield frame lean back far enough that you can hit your head on the way in, with the top down.
- We entertain ourselves no end trying to reconcile the fuel gauge, actual miles driven, visual fuel economy graph and fuel readout. The needle was down to 3/4 tank after 17.3 miles, range dropped from 278 to 260 in 4 miles. But it claims average fuel economy of 16.5. After 212.8 miles, we'd actually averaged 15.7 mpg per refill.



Within four minutes of turning the key, we'd noted that it has "power aplenty, straight away" and "a nice low-key V8 rumble, well executed."

The XK has an entire body shell (internal chassis structure and external body panels) constructed from a combination of pressed, cast and extruded aluminum alloy components. These are riveted and bonded together using techniques originally developed in the aerospace industry and adapted for automotive use by Jaguar. The result is a body shell with the highest structural integrity which is also the lightest shell in its class, by a significant margin, and the most torsionally stiff. This combination of strength, rigidity and lightness underpin the XK's fuel-efficient performance, safety, durability and precise chassis dynamics.

Mike Cross, Vehicle Integrity Chief Engineer, explains, "Lightness benefits agility, and agility with high performance defines the exhilarating yet refined nature of the Jaguar XK. It accelerates harder, stops more quickly and handles with true precision."

All this go-power has to be met with stopping power, and we found the brakes to be stellar, nothing they are so good, they're even a *little* bit grabby at times, but we're not complaining.

Ultimately, for \$90 grand, the Jaguar XK convertible is a gotta-have-it car. However, for that price, you could also take a look at a year-or-two-old Aston Martin, you could look at a Porsche Boxster for less money, or if you have to have its alleged back seat, the 911. But you wouldn't have Jaguar exclusivity, nor would you have the V8 roar. Whether a buyer is considering style, form, function, budget or social pecking order, the Jaguar delivers.

We drive cars we don't mind turning back in, cars we could keep indefinitely with a shrug, and occasionally cars we would love to keep. The XK is a keeper. We haven't driven the XKR yet and assume we'd love it, but with an XK in your hands, you won't really even feel the need. ■