

2006 Jaguar XJR Supercharged
Cause for Reflections on a Special Friend: Jaguar
For The Wheel
By David Ray, www.hookedondriving.com



Sharing the experience that we go through with cars can be a very personal thing. Certainly, there are plenty of objective measures to be utilized in comparing one car to another, but if you read these reviews regularly, you know that we're not about statistics, but the experience. As I dig deep for inspiration in documenting our week with the XJR, I'm taken back to an earlier, simpler time in my life. Living in small town Indiana in the sixties, my older sister had a suitor come to visit from far away. We had moved, he had had his chance at our previous residence, and he came to visit in hopes of rekindling what he'd lost. And he did so in a British racing green Jaguar XKE. When the car arrived in the neighborhood of middle class, family friendly homes, the kids were drawn to the car like a magnet. It was the first such car to hit town, and it was like someone had driven in from Alpha Centauri. The smooth, curvaceous lines, the dished headlights...and Tom (the owner/sister suitor), opened the hood for us. OH MY GOODNESS – I'd never seen an entire car open like the E Type bonnet – leaning forward exposing such an artistic rendering of automotive art in its elegant straight six...So the story goes – Tom got my vote, and the vote of every kid from 6 to 60 in the neighborhood. But, alas – my sister just didn't get it. In fact, the Jag didn't spend much time in the neighborhood...and the only thing that was good about that was that we got to hear him fire the six-banger up in somewhat of an enthusiastic “well I'll show you” rev, and hot foot it out of town. My image of Jaguar was set for life.

But, with federal bumper requirements, followed by the smog regulations, followed by the energy crisis, followed by the Japanese import crisis, Jaguar, a once proud leader in the sporting automotive world, quietly wandered off on what seemed to be a “Vision Quest” for the next 30 years. While I have always held the name Jaguar in high esteem, it has been with reservations, and maybe even some sympathy. They were victims – sporting folks who got caught with not enough cash in the bank, or technology in the R & D department. But tradition and brand names

are powerful things. Maybe it's these two assets that provided the conduit to the acquisition of Jaguar by Ford Motor Co. The purist found this transaction repugnant, the realist celebrated that Jaguar had one last chance.

Dateline: July, 2006 – much water has passed under the automotive bridge, and I have been entrusted with a current, best of brand Jaguar XJR sedan to drive for a week. I don't take this responsibility lightly. Earlier this year I reviewed the Jaguar S Type R and veritably raved – a sleeper in a close match with the venerable 5 Series BMW. What would the flagship have in store?

The XJR is a truly elegant automobile. To some, the restyling two years ago was done too conservatively. I guess, being a hard-core enthusiast, I would share this opinion. A more dramatic and risky step forward would have been welcomed with this version of the XJ. But it is what it is – and, enthusiast or not, this car has class and character. It is unmistakably, all Jaguar. And somehow, while you know you're driving a top of the line, expensive (\$85K) luxury import, it just doesn't seem as pretentious as the counterpart from the German republic. After all, this car is made in the UK, the home of the Spitfire and Sprite, how could this car be pretentious? As one begins their XJ experience, it is obvious to the trained tush that this car is glued together really well. To be more technical, Jaguar gets huge kudos for their riveting technology, breaking from virtually everyone else in the world who spot welds their cars. Built of aluminum to keep bulk down, the rivets are far more frequent than others' spot welds, so you can count on this body being very squeak free, and a great platform to develop a suspension that is predictable under all circumstances.

The driving experience goes like this: the 4.2 liter, supercharged engine makes the car very fast, if not quick. As the car exhibits a bit of surge on light acceleration (my wife who drove it and I both agreed on this word), one would have to watch carefully in slower speed limit zones to keep the car at city street speeds. From 60mph to 90mph (professional driver, closed course) this car is a rocket. So acceleration has been accomplished nicely with the blower. Oh and by the way – the supercharger whine is pretty cool too. The suspension is a mixed bag. While very crisp, what Jaguar may have done with the "R" model is build a car that's a bit too stiff for their traditional tweed jacket buyers, and not sporty enough overall for the BMW M or Mercedes AMG buyer. Do we want to run off to an autocross with the XJR? Are you bloody kidding? Spirited motoring in a 4500lb car is what this is about, and Jaguar has executed admirably. We were able to spend an entire day on a journey to Reno and back, and felt all along, coddled and proud of what we were driving. The "S" setting on the suspension was useful, but not dramatic in its impact on our impressions. The interior is true classic elegance. Rich leathers, dark wood tones, chrome in the traditional places. In the R, they've "upgraded" the seats to be a bit more sporty, but like the suspension tuning, may have missed the mark here – somewhat of a compromise that may not excite the tweed suiter or the enthusiast. But overall the ergonomics, feels and touches as one lives with the XJR are pleasing. The overall fit and finish of this car is at the level of the finest, yet somehow retains the feel of hand crafting while other high end marques seem more automated and modern.

The bottom line here is do you love Jaguars? If you do, this car will please you immensely as a quantum leap of the Jags of yesteryear. And, I won't ask forgiveness for the editorial to follow. The term "halo" car has been bandied about in the automotive press to describe a low volume, high impact image car, such as the Corvette for Chevrolet, Viper for Dodge, 350Z for Nissan. These marques don't make their companies big dollars, but they show what the company is capable of doing – and inspire employees and buyers in the process. I long for – and would plead with Jaguar/Ford management to build a Jaguar halo car. If there is a marque out there that is worth its weight in gold, it's the Jag. But for the last 30 years, we've had no example of the

true sports car that they could build. Please – if you can build an XJR this good, you should be able to put a sports car in the market, somewhere between the 350Z and the Carrera, that would reestablish this brand and give us Yanks a way to express appreciation for the XKE that we all fell in love with many years ago.