

2008 Jaguar XKR
A SuperCat with an Identity Crisis
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When an automotive writer is truly conflicted, you have no idea how tough it is. Therapy might be a solution, but deadline looms. As passionate opinions abound in our space, tearing our hair out appears as a possible appeasement to get through the tough times, but in the end, we must write. Put finger to keyboard and fashion words that are clear, lucid and concise by those who relate to this automotive/driving addiction.

And so it goes with our review of a very special car – the Jaguar XKR. It's possible that if they had loaned me the merely mortal XK, I wouldn't have dived to the depths of conflict, confusion and torment. But – those Jaguar PR folks just wouldn't leave well enough alone – they made me drive the supercharged "R: model. This car has the following afflictions:

- 420-horsepower, 32 valve supercharged 4.2-liter V8 engine
- 6-speed ZF automatic transmission with paddle shifter
- 19-in. Jupiter wheels
- Optional 19-in. chromed Sabre wheels
- Optional 20-in. Senta wheels
- Aluminum-finish side window surround, trunk plinth and power side vents
- Body-colored hood louvers

- Quad tailpipes with bright finishers
- Adaptive Front Lighting
- Aluminum interior trim
- Rich, high-gloss Burl Walnut or satin-finish Poplar interior trim available at no extra cost

OK – credit/blame must be given to the Jaguar website, as this list is pilfered from their spec page on the car. Anyone starting to get a glimpse of this affliction, dare I say identity crisis? Notice the 420 HP V8 followed by all fru-fru stuff? Body-colored hood louvers listed as a feature? Quad tailpipes with bright finishers? This is like putting Joe Montana in an Armani suit with a set of gold chains about his neck. Where are their priorities? I fear the answer.

The R model, by all rights, is the performance breed amongst what is the otherwise “sporting lady and gentleman’s” car. But they got the two mixed up badly – maybe the marketing folks had it out with the car people inside Jaguar Cars and won the battle. The car folks put all the bits on the car to make it an “R” but then the image folks took the car and beautified, and injected a sissified image into a screaming fast car.

The demonstrator, an example of what is clearly one of the most beautiful cars ever made, was adorned in powder blue metallic, with a soft creamy leather interior....yikes, this car must be a cushwagon made for ladies with Coach purses to cruise Rodeo Drive, right?

Wong Elmer – this thing of beauty has the heart of a killer cat. Maybe they were going for the Sleeper of the Century award – adding high-end image to the list of ways to surprise the local Vette and Porsche drivers – as only a moment’s hesitation by the uninformed will have them eating Jaguar dust. At 4.9 seconds in the 0-60, one might not even get to be noticed on one’s drive down Rodeo Drive in the XKR.

So – nonsense momentarily set aside, I LOVE this car. With a high tech aluminum body to keep weight to 3800 lbs, which actually isn’t that bad for this type of car, the XKR quietly hides its potential under a very civilized cloak. One could own this car, use it as their daily driver – to work, shopping, movies, vacations and think it was perfectly civilized. But all along they would have been driving a flat-out fun to drive hot rod without knowing it. Yes, they have hidden this rod within too well. The light cream, comfy interior with the aluminum trim is sweet – but what I really like about the R is the sweet acceleration, handling, and even braking. With oversized calipers and rotors, a very hard run could not produce any fade. And one sense came to the fore as we pushed the Jag lots further than you can on Rodeo – the car has a delightful, light feel. “Toss me” the Jag calls out – and so I did and enjoyed every minute of it. This is a driver’s car in the guise of a luxury coupe. They simply did not put enough of the more aggressive image, or edge in this package. The “S” model that is associated with the XKR may have it, but this R should have it too – black out trim, aggressive sport interior, weight saving spartan trim. But they’ve mixed in the elegant image with the hot rod package....this is the identity crisis of which I speak. Clearly, based on the cosmetics of this gorgeous car, buyers will not really understand what they’re getting. Most will never drive this car even close to its potential. It really is a shame. And, would the aggressive, sport-minded driver buy this interior? Tough call, but it’s at best a big deterrent.

Two more significant issues should be, unfortunately discussed. We had the misfortune of needing the back seat during the week we enjoyed the R. This was actually a hazardous enterprise. When one sees a svelte adult woman attempt to climb in back, struggle to find a

place for her legs, followed by the driver entering with the front seat all the way to the fore – both people in almost dangerous, straining positions even for a three mile drive – the back seat really is just false advertising. It's not. It's something that looks kind of like a back seat but isn't one. But ok – we can deal with that – just don't ever count on it. What's really a bigger disappointment is the rear hatch. Surprisingly, the space offered in the far back is very shallow – one will have to get the right sized bag to do a weekend.

I write from the enthusiast's point of view, and from that perspective, the XKR is a frustrating car. I suppose that if we went for a different color combination than the blue/tan, and if they had truly sport seats with the sports coupe, we'd be right in Porsche's back yard with an interloper capable of stealing those who think the P-car might be a bit too sporty. And yes, that buyer would be delighted with what they bought. But we've got to get through to Tata and the gang that the identity of this car should not be any mystery at all. The Jaguar XKR is a very fast, quiet, modern, wonderful sports coupe that handles like a sports car. Let's give it that facelift so that we enthusiasts understand right away what this car is all about.