



# Prey to a silent cat

The new Jaguar XJ grabs its driver and passengers in the nicest possible way, writes **Neil Dowling**

**B**IG cars normally frighten me. Put me in one ahead of a long and winding, rutted country road with broken shoulders and I'd rather partner Molly Meldrum on *Dancing with the Stars*.

Thankfully, gowning up with Mr Meldrum won't happen because this week there was a big car that could dance its alloys off on roads that only a NSW taxpayer would defend.

At 5.1m in standard wheelbase, Jaguar's latest XJ flagship is clearly a big car.

What makes it take to gnarly roads with such unexpected aplomb is a combination of chassis dynamics and darn good suspension. But more than anything else, it's because it weighs not much more than a Commodore, despite its physical presence on the road.

Aluminium body panels, magnesium castings, rivets and epoxy glues reduce the XJ to as low as 1755kg for the 5-litre V8 — about the same as a VE Calais V6 automatic.

Jaguar offered test cars with three different engines and two wheelbases for a run through roads inland from Tweed Heads — a 3-litre bi-turbo V6 diesel, 5-litre petrol V8 and the supercharged version of the V8.

Even the turbo-diesel was ridiculously quiet for an oiler. Double glazing makes a considerable difference to keeping the noise of road, wind and envious fans away from the inside.

Add to that, the extraordinary breadth and depth of music from the 20 speakers of the optional Bowers and Wilkins 1200-watt audio.

All XJs have steering-column paddles to pluck the best out of the six cogs. Many drivers may not wish to interrupt thoughts of corporate takeovers with the tedium of flicking alloy levers, but I loved it.

That's because the XJ doesn't quite feel like a limousine should. There were many times that I'd forget that behind my head, I was towing three seats and a commodious boot. It felt like a coupe, or at least a smaller sedan, as the car dived into a corner. Where there could be that lurch as the mass finally figured out there was a major directional change in progress, the XJ showed no indecision.

Where a big car may lean nervously through a tight bend, the Jaguar remained flat. And where some steering systems were uncomfortably vague and without transmitting direction, the XJ knew where it was going and was continually letting the driver know.

I enjoyed the mid-range kick in the pants of the diesel and its ability to keep shovelling on the torque as the car wound its way through the hills. The V8 petrol was wonderful for its speed and engine note and the supercharged version for its total disregard of the XJ buyer's luxury ideals. Opt for the even more explosive Supersport engine, available later this year, and you're well into Panamera/Quattroporte/Rapide territory.

Clever in engineering detail, this big cat also comes with something that its nearest rival, BMW's 7-Series, doesn't have: looks.

This is a very pretty car. On the road, everybody stares. It's not just because it's new. Its size dominates the road and its fluid shape and arresting colours — black, silver and beige — caught eyes that missed the car first time.

The instrument panel is glare-free and can be tailored to relay specific data. All Jags get a big touchscreen for most audio, ventilation, satnav and comfort adjustments and it doesn't take long to see how these are quicker, safer and

easier to use than central controllers such as BMW's iDrive.

There are, as you'd expect in a car of this class and price, a lot of switchgear and readout options, but there is a sense of logic to the XJ's layout that doesn't confuse the driver.

It's surprisingly easy to drive and it has everything you'd want in a car. It shows that a small carmaker such as Jaguar can adapt to a buyer's profile very different to the one 42 years ago when the first XJ was unveiled.

Once there were limousines that chauffeured their owners. It's now a different world. Chauffeur-driven rides are for children and guests. A more driven species of executive opts for — and will pay for — the privilege of getting behind the wheel.

In Jaguar's case, the owner gets opulence, silence, a sophisticated array of electronic wizardry, stunning performance, loungeroom comfort and space.

It's a big ask, but the XJ delivers.

## Jaguar XJ

**Prices:** from \$198,800 (V6 turbodiesel Premium Luxury) to \$367,000 (V8 supercharged Supersport LWB)  
**Body:** four-door saloon  
**Engines:** 3-litre V6 202kW/600Nm bi-turbodiesel; 5-litre 283kW/515Nm petrol V8; 5-litre 346kW/575Nm supercharged petrol V8; 375kW/625Nm supercharged petrol V8 Supersport  
**Transmission:** six-speed ZF automatic; steering-column paddles; three modes  
**Fuel economy:** 7 litres/100km (diesel); 11.3 litres/100km (V8); 12.1 litres/100km (supercharged V8)  
**0-100km/h:** 6.4sec (diesel); 5.7sec (V8); 5.2sec (s/c V8); 4.9sec (Supersport)



**It's got the lot: the XJ delivers in opulence, silence, electronic wizardry, stunning performance, comfort and space. It even got Elle MacPherson back on the cat-walk.**

