

The *Winding Road* took us east this time, to visit family and friends. There, Jaguar graciously provided the all-new XJR to drive through the hill-and-dale countryside of Maryland and Pennsylvania.

That “R,” by the way, stands for high performance in Jaguar-speak, and in this case it dishes up an extra 100 horsepower over the regular XJ sedan. It was a beauty, too. Metallic silver-blue paint and light gray interior with burl walnut trim gave this XJR a soft, sophisticated look that offered little hint of the supercharged 390 horsepower iron fist tucked under the hood.

Said motor, coupled with Jaguar’s 6-speed automatic transmission, provides impressive acceleration. Expect 0–60 times in the upper five-second range. The sounds it makes with foot to the floor are exquisite as well. I loved its subdued growl combined with the supercharger’s whine.

Compared to last year’s XJ, the changes in lines and stance are subtle yet significant. They all add up to a smoother, more contemporary look that nicely retains the characteristic Jaguar presence. It’s a design that, 20 years from now, will still look sharp, clean, and handsome. “Classic,” in other words.

The new design includes an aluminum body to replace last year’s steel one. Not only is it 60% stiffer, but it brings a whopping 400-pound weight reduction. This pays dividends in improved ride, handling, braking, acceleration and fuel consumption.

Inside, be prepared for the coddling you’d expect for a car priced above \$80,000 (the XJ with standard V-8 starts at about \$60,000). Though too many to recount here, the amenities I valued the most included the tilt/tele wheel *plus* adjustable foot pedals. Combined with 12-way seat adjustments, you’re in for a perfect fit regardless of your size and proportions. And on the nippy October morning leaving behind the home and hospitality of cousins George and Cecile in Pennsylvania, the heated steering wheel and seats (front and rear) felt heavenly.

Its adaptive cruise control is a marvel as well. With sensors engaged, it signals a computer to release the throttle, and even apply the brakes, if you get too close to another car, or if someone suddenly cuts in front of you.

Finally, try and find a more beautiful

PHOTO BY MIKE COONEY



2004 Jaguar XJR

Poised to Pounce—on the Competition

interior in a car priced under \$150,000. Jaguar has a way with wood and fine leather that makes you feel downright “privileged.”

Driving the XJR proves that luxury and fun can comfortably co-exist. On winding roads, sharp steering maneuvers showed that the XJR, while offering refined ride quality, is capable of being manhandled without complaint. Body roll was well controlled, and the optional 20-inch wheel-tire combo provided plenty of grip, although over freeway expansion strips the tire’s slim sidewalls allowed noticeable “thumps” to interrupt the cabin’s quiet.

Later, while in Maryland, we traveled south into Virginia to enjoy a tour of George Washington’s home, Mt. Vernon, courtesy of friends Mike and Martha Dale. With four in the car, ride and handling remained comfortable and poised, thanks to Jaguar’s self-leveling air suspension combined with Computer Active Technology Suspension (CATS) that instantly firms the shock absorbers as needed for stability in quick turns or to resist bottoming over large bumps.

Back in California, I got to drive an XJR flat out at Willow Springs Raceway. Now *there’s* a “Winding Road”! Lesser cars wilt under the extremes of the track, but not the XJR.

With power that never quit and highly competent handling, its true nature broke through and provided an exhilarating drive that left me highly impressed. This is one sure-footed cat.

Thanks to its lighter weight, the supercharged XJR now receives the same EPA mileage rating as last year’s regular V-8 model: 17-city and 24-highway. Our trip on freeways (including rush-hour bumper-to-bumper traffic), country roads and city streets returned an average of 19.8 mpg. This XJR carried a suggested retail price of \$81,695 including navigation system and destination fees. Deduct \$4,500 if you stay with the standard 19-inch wheels and tires.

An appropriate phrase to describe the newest XJ is “more for ’04.” Not only do you enjoy higher levels of performance and amenities, you also get more interior room and a larger trunk. Combine that with the R-variant’s greater power, and you have an exceptional package. Beautiful materials, creature comforts, competent handling, pushed-back-in-the-seat acceleration—this newest cat from Jaguar dishes up a lot of driving pleasure for its fortunate owners. 

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