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With the refined acceleration of a 290hp V8 and speed-sensitive rack-and-pinion steering, the Jaguar XJB can give you the most exhilarating run of the day.

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## Feature - XJ8 (X308/XJR8) 1997-2002

**The V8-powered 1997-2002 Jaguar XJ X308 is one of the great bargains of our time – and an excellent car in its own right.**

It was the third and final evolution of the XJ40 platform which had been in production since 1986 and followed on from the XJ X300.

### Spot the Differences

The biggest change was the replacement of the six-cylinder engine with a V8, first seen in the XK8 a year earlier.

The model line-up was similar to the XJ X300 with eight variations.

- ◇ XJ8 3.2 litre saloon (called the Executive in some countries).
- ◇ 3.2 litre Sports (4.0 litre Aust & USA)
- ◇ 4.0 litre saloon
- ◇ 4.0 litre Sovereign
- ◇ XJR Supercharged
- ◇ Daimler V8
- ◇ Daimler Super V8

### Engines

Having discontinued production of both the AJ16 in-line six and V12 engines, Jaguar offered only its newly designed 32 valve V8 engine (AJ26-V8.)

Overall, the X308 was 200lb lighter than the outgoing X300, with much of that down to the new power unit. Designed to provide refined power, to meet forthcoming emission regulations, and to match the competition. The AJ26 met all its targets.

The base saloon and Sports used a new 240bhp 3.2 litre version, while all other models used the existing 290bhp 4.0 litre power unit from the XK8.

The XJR used a supercharged 370bhp version of the 4.0 litre V8, as did the top of the range Daimler (now called Super V8 instead of Double Six).

### Exterior Differences

The XJ8 continued with the rounded four-headlamp bonnet (with improved lights), low roofline, sloping tail, and wrap-around rear light clusters.

Although the X308 kept much of the same exterior styling as its predecessor, 30 per cent of all the panels were changed, and the amount of high-strength steel in the body was doubled.

Starting at the front, the two generations can be differentiated by the shape of

the indicator lenses (rectangular on the X300, oval on the X308), and also by the shape of the fog lamps and lower valance air intake (both of which are more rounded on the X308).

The bumper style was new and more curved and the chrome quarter blades were mounted at the top, replacing the single piece chrome on earlier cars. Even the radiator grille was re-shaped subtly.

Side views remained as before, the only instant tell-tail for the V8's are the oval indicator repeater lights in the side of the front and rear bumpers.

At the rear the same style of bumper followed through incorporating a neat lip spoiler below, and again the twin chrome blades replaced a single piece of chrome. The taillights now had red/clear lenses rather than the X300 red/grey lenses.

There was new badging and oval exhaust pipes plus the instantly identifiable high set brake light in the back window.

Wheel size went up to 17-inches on the standard cars, giving the X308 a more contemporary stance.



### JAGUAR XJ8 3.2 (XJ Executive in Europe)

*The XJ8 came standard with more equipment than had been fitted to entry-level XJ's in the past, including leather upholstery, 20 spoke alloy wheels, and air conditioning. The door mirrors and door handles were body-coloured. In late 2000, Jaguar began badging some XJ8 models as "XJ Executive", and fitted as standard rain-sensing wipers, a CD player, cruise control, and rear parking sensors.*



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### Additional Bulkhead

Because the AJ26 V8 was more compact than the AJ16 inline six, this enabled a second bulkhead to be fitted in the engine bay.

This not only provided an extra barrier against noise and vibration entering the cabin, but allowed many important parts of the electrical system to be fitted behind it, out of harm's way.

### Interior

The biggest change to the interior on the X308 was to the dashboard, which had remained essentially the same since the original XJ40 with only detail changes over the years. The rectangular instrument binnacle gave way to three deeply recessed dials similar in style to the recently introduced Jaguar XK8.

The new fascia also allowed for the restoration of a proper glove compartment, which had been lost when the original XJ40 dash had been retrofitted with a passenger side airbag. Door trim and the design of the centre console were also slightly revised.

### Mechanicals

No manual gearbox or limited slip differential option were available for any models. The 5-speed automatic was either a ZF 5HP24 or Mercedes-Benz W5A580 (Supercharged models only).

Computer-controlled suspension was available as a feature named "Computer Active Technology Suspension" (CATS).

### Models

#### ◇ XJ8

The 3.2 litre saloon was considered the entry model to the range and only offered on the standard wheelbase.

However, the XJ8 came standard with more equipment than had been fitted to entry-level XJs in the past, including leather upholstery, alloy wheels, and air conditioning. The door mirrors and door handles were body-coloured.

The radiator grille, windscreen and rear window surrounds, boot lid plinth, and rain gutters were chromed, while the window frames remained matte black. Interior wood trim was walnut. Rear badging read "XJ8".

The 4.0 litre saloon was an amalgam of the 3.2 litre and Sports saloon and can be differentiated by the Sports blackened windscreen and rear window surrounds.

The 3.2 litre used 20 spoke alloy wheels seen on some X300 models (XJ12) where as the 4.0 litre XJ8 used the stylish Celtic 10 spoke alloy wheels.

#### ◇ Sport

The Sport model was normally equipped with the 3.2 litre engine, except Australia/US that also offered the 4.0 litre normally aspirated V8.

The Sports model offered stiffer suspension, sportier seating and interior colour combinations, and wider/larger wheels than the XJ8.

The windscreen and rear window surrounds were painted matt black, as were the rain gutters and window frames for European markets (the US retained chrome surrounds).

The radiator grille has metallic grey vertical slats. Rear badging reads "XJ Sport". There were only 1,108 "Sport" models produced.



### JAGUAR XJ8 SPORT (4.0 LITRE MODEL in US)

*This car, like the previous Sport models, was aimed at younger Jaguar buyers. This meant wider tyres on the existing wheels, new badging, stiffer suspension, sportier seating and interior colour combinations with grey painted centre vanes in the grille. The windscreen and rear window surrounds were painted matt black, as were the rain gutters and window (the US retained chrome surrounds).*





## JAGUAR SOVEREIGN LONG WHEELBASE

*The Sovereign was the top of the range Jaguar and used the 4.0 litre engine and a significant amount of chrome including the vanes in the radiator grille. Sovereign's also had integrated headlight power wash system as well as its own style of alloy wheels. Jaguar also released a LWB version in 1998 that was 100 mm (4 inches) longer with a correspondingly taller rear roof profile to provide additional headroom.*

### ◇ Sovereign

The Sovereign represented the highest luxury specification for Jaguar models, sitting next to the XJR, which provides the ultimate performance.

Sovereigns featured more elaborate/expensive wood veneer, commonly highly figured burr walnut; with window control/ashtray trim panels also done in wood veneer as opposed to plastic in other models.

The Leather is also of a higher quality and often features contrasting piping, with seats being of the traditional fluted style.

The suspension setup was biased towards touring and the wheels were normally 16" or 17" unique Starburst ten-spoke alloy wheels to provide high profile tyres for additional ride quality.

Computer Active Technology System adaptive suspension was also offered as a rare option.

Externally a Sovereign can be distinguished by the complete use of highly polished steel/chrome work around windows and rear light clusters;

as well as polished radiator grill and boot garnish. The cars are simply badged as "Sovereign" with no mention of "XJ".

Jaguar also released a long wheelbase version of the Sovereign in 1998. The difference being that the car is around 4 inches longer, with the rear doors being noticeably longer than the front; there is also correspondingly taller rear roof profile to provide additional headroom.

### ◇ XJR

The XJR is powered by the supercharged version of the 4.0 L V8. It is also equipped with sport suspension, wider wheels and tyres, and matte-black exterior window trim. There is no chrome on the car at all except for the bumper blades.

The XJR has a body-coloured radiator grille surround with a stainless-steel mesh insert rather than the normal vanes. Other exterior touches include the "XJR" rear badging and larger exhaust outlets.

Available on late XJR models was an "R1" performance option. This included 18" BBS five-spoke wheels, larger Brembo brakes with cross-drilled rotors, and re-tuned lower set suspension.

The XJR was capable of reaching 97 km/h (60 mph) from a standstill in 5.6 seconds, with an electronically limited top speed of 249 km/h (155 mph).

### ◇ XJR 100

In 2001, to commemorate the 100th anniversary of Sir William Lyons' birth, Jaguar produced 500 examples of a special-edition model named the "XJR 100".

Only available in the Anthracite exterior colour with charcoal leather upholstery, the interior is trimmed with contrasting red stitching and birdseye maple. It is fitted with a leather-covered sports steering wheel and MOMO shift knob.

The XJR 100 uses the Brembo brakes otherwise found on the R1-equipped XJR and 19-inch "Montreal"-style wheels manufactured by BBS.

### ◇ XJ8 SE

Produced only in 2002, the SE (Special Equipment) model was fitted with more equipment than the original base model, and was offered at a competitive price. The rear badging read "SE", and the cars were fitted with reverse parking sensors as standard.



# Feature - XJ8 (X308/XJR8) 1997-2002

## ◇ Daimler/Vanden Plas

The top-of-the-range Daimler marque (sold as the Vanden Plas model in certain markets like the United States) features softer suspension and all available luxury features. They are cosmetically differentiated from the Jaguar by the traditional Daimler fluted radiator grille surround and fluted boot-lid plinth.

The Daimler and Vanden Plas cars were also available with the supercharged engine found only in the XJR. This model was named the Daimler Super V8.

These supercharged variants were also fitted with Jaguar's CATS adaptive suspension from the XJR, but replaced by a "touring" set-up that was softer and more compliant than that fitted to the XJR.

## Reception

Motor Trend described the X308 as, "a masterful blend of British luxury and American muscle. This car makes you feel elegant and gets sweeter by the mile," calling it a "muscle car in a tuxedo."

Brian Cooley, an editor of Roadshow by CBS, called the X308 his "favourite modern car."

Motorious claimed the X308 provides the most luxurious ride of any car ever produced due to its status as the "last steel-bodied XJ and the first to feature a modern V8 drivetrain, the perfect concoction of classic and contemporary Jaguars," continuing that, "this is a car that fits anywhere it goes, be that the supermarket car park, a country hotel or even outside the Casino de Monte-Carlo."

Jeremy Clarkson of *Top Gear* remarked that the X308 is "faster, in the real world, than a Ferrari F355... fastest saloon I've ever seen, the epitome of luxury, beauty, and performance".

## Factory Recalls

Despite the excellent reviews, it would be an oversight to skip over a number of problems that the early XJ8's experienced. Primarily, engine problems that cast a cloud over what is considered by many to be a remarkably refined and efficient engine.

20 years on, these problems have generally been addressed by the factory or by the owners themselves (sometimes at considerable expense).

## ▪ Nikasil Coated Engines

The original aluminium V8 engine had Nikasil plated bores to save weight, something BMW were also using at the time. It was a decision that was to come back and haunt Jaguar...

Because aluminium is too soft to withstand the action of the piston rings scraping up and down, the bores were coated with Nikasil, an ultra-hard friction-reducing mixture of nickel, silicon and carbon, often likened as a "Teflon" for engines.

Although Nikasil was successfully used in motor racing, Jaguar discovered that some high sulphur petrol's (esp. USA), created sulphuric acid which attacked the Nikasil bore linings, obliging them to replace entire engines with steel-liners within a year. If it were not for Jaguar's decision to replace many engines, free of charge, the company's reputation may well have been damaged.

As it has turned out the AJ-V8, with relatively minor changes, continues to be produced today, and with the right care, the engines are near bullet-proof.

*Steel-liners fitted from VIN number F20645.*



## JAGUAR XJR

*The most instantly identifiable features of the exterior are the mesh radiator grille and the lower set suspension. Other differences include body coloured radiator grille surround and boot finisher. Also, there is no chrome on the car at all except the bumper blades. The supercharged 4.0 litre V8 produced 363 hp@ 6150 rpm and the cars were speed limited to 250 km/h (155 mph).*





## DAIMLER SUPER V8

*Like the Sovereign, there is chrome everywhere including plated door handles, unique to both Daimler models. The radiator grille and rear boot finisher are both fluted in accordance with Daimler convention. Badging is in scripted style with either Eight or Super V8 on the boot lid. Chrome alloy wheels are fitted to the Eight and Solar alloys on the Super V8, both fitted with centre hubs to conceal the wheel nuts.*

### ■ Engine Issues

Most, if not all XJ8's have had problems with the upper timing chain tensioners. These issues have been well documented and almost certainly the upper and lower tensioners/slippers have now been replaced on most cars with more durable replacements.

There were also problems with faulty thermostats and water pumps. Early water pumps had plastic impellers that had a tendency to lose efficiency and eventually disintegrate leading to overheating and potential head gasket failure. Overtime, most water pumps have been upgraded for the later version which has a metal, not plastic impeller.

### ■ Transmission Problems

All naturally aspirated XJ8's were fitted with a ZF automatic transmission, which although not necessarily a bad design, was hampered by the fact that it was a 'sealed for life' with no dipstick or easily accessed fill point.

This was intended to reduce service costs, but inability of the transmission oil to last much past 100,000 kms without

turning into a dark foul-smelling sludge, meant that many owners were faced with the expense of a complete rebuild or replacement.

### ■ Recalls

For club members who have owned their XJ8 from new, they would be familiar with the various recalls that ranged from automatic transmission problems to those involving the vehicle's glass sunroof.

As previously noted, by and large these issues have been addressed and are now only dimly remembered and overshadowed by what many owners regard as an excellent, very reliable and superb Jaguar that makes a stylish, rapid and reliable car.

### Production

X308 production ceased in December 2002 after 126,260 examples had been built. The X308 was replaced in production by the all-aluminium X350.

### Review - What are the benefits?

Numerous magazine articles on the XJ8 have been written over the years and are summarised here as follows:

◇ The X308 rides smoothly, provides little to no road noise, powers along effortlessly even in baby 3.2-litre form and offer a driving position that is second to none.

◇ These big cats can cover intergalactic mileages if serviced regularly. The XJ8 is ideal for loping across the continent and you'll even grasp 30mpg along the motorway. Fast, frugal (by Jag terms, at least) and stylish – what's not to like?

◇ The X308 make a wonderful car in which to go touring. The traction control laughs in the face of road sleet and wet motorways.

◇ The blend of ride comfort, quietness, uncomplaining nature and relative frugality make it an ideal candidate for bargain of the decade. Buy one now, before prices head skywards.

For more information consider the following videos.

[Jaguar XJR vs Mercedes E-Class - Richard Hammond](#)

[1999 XJ8 Vanden Plas Review and Test Drive](#)