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2011 Jaguar XJ Road Test Review

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Test Drive: 2011 Jaguar XJ

Jaguar's New Flagship Emphasizes Present Over the Past

By: [Eric Tegler](#), Contributor**Vehicle Tested:** 2011 Jaguar XJ 4dr Sedan (5.0L 8cyl 6A)**Pros:** Stylistically distinct, luxurious ride and interior, quick and agile, not German or Japanese.**Cons:** A-pillars obstruct visibility, rotary shifter requires acclimatization.

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Until recently, Jaguar products were like the permanent exhibits in the British Museum: identifiable and familiar bits of national heritage changing little over the decades. But the flagship 2011 Jaguar XJ sedan says good-bye to all that. The company's DNA remains within but it's a luxury sedan that looks forward, not back. With the XJ's introduction, the company's managing director, Mike Driscoll says, "Phase one of rebuilding Jaguar is complete." It's a phase you'll like, if you're in the market for a premium sedan.

When it debuted in the late 1960s, the XJ was viewed as a break with the past. The 2011 XJ is even more so. It arguably provides the best luxury/sporting balance in a segment dominated by impressive but cold German machines ([Audi A8](#), [BMW 7 Series](#), [Mercedes-Benz S-Class](#)) and Japan's more saccharine idea of luxury ([Lexus LS 460](#)). The XJ has all the contemporary technology you could want but it also has character, a vitally important trait in cars north of \$70,000. From the curb, from behind the steering wheel and from the backseat, you understand what the XJ is and what it isn't, and that's a good thing.

There are a few stylistic flourishes inside and, most notably, outside that have been greeted with love-it or hate-it reactions. However, there is unlikely to be the same sort of polarization when it comes to driving and riding in the 2011 Jaguar XJ. It goes like a scalded cat but never leaves a scratch on comfort.

Performance

Jaguar's new 5.0-liter V8 is the beating heart of the company's American offerings. In the XJ, it's available in 385-horsepower (380 pound-feet of torque) normally aspirated form, or with a supercharger, producing 470 or 510 hp. The three engine ratings serve to distinguish the base XJ from the XJ Supercharged and special-order XJ Supersport models. All three are available in standard-wheelbase (SWB) or long-wheelbase (LWB, 5.3 inches longer) trim.

The big cat launches hard but with

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Elegant, yet muscular and full of character: From the front, there's no mistaking that the 2011 XJ is a Jaguar.

(photo by: Jaguar Land Rover North America LLC)

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decided smoothness. There's little suspension squat, and shifts through all six of the automatic's gears come positively as the engine spins to its 6,000-rpm limit. Selecting the Dynamic mode (one of three driving modes along with standard and winter) advances throttle response and firms up the suspension, while the Sport selection allows for automanual paddle-shifting and holds the transmission in the selected gear. It's also how you'll sprint to 60 mph in 5.4 seconds in the standard XJ, 4.9 seconds in the Supercharged and 4.7 seconds in the Supersport, according to Jaguar's testing.

The 2011 Jaguar XJ's predominantly aluminum chassis is more rigid than the outgoing car, allowing engineers to tune the suspension for improved ride and handling. Though 265 pounds heavier overall than the old XJ, the new car remains significantly lighter than its rivals, allowing Jaguar to trumpet an efficiency and performance advantage it has enjoyed for years. Indeed, the SWB and LWB XJ achieve a combined 19 and 18 mpg, respectively, according to the EPA. The Supercharged and Supersport get a combined 17 mpg.

In the corners, the standard SWB Jaguar takes a set on turn-in and arcs through nicely. You do notice the sedan's 3,870-pound curb weight, but body motions are well-controlled whether in Dynamic or Standard modes. With its softer setting, the latter is actually more effective when the road surface is not smooth. Steering is more precise than some of the XJ's competitors and the wheel itself is right-sized and feels good in your palms. The XJ doesn't feel like a sports car, but its torque and handling allow the driver to hustle it quite readily.

Comfort

The balance that the 2011 Jaguar XJ seeks to strike pits dynamic driving excitement against opulence. These are the eternal, and contradictory, goals sought by many automakers. Performance demands favorable power-to-weight and high damping rates. Premium comfort requires more suspension travel and more weight in sound insulation, electronics, labor-saving electric motors and advanced safety devices. Modern technology allows the XJ to marry the two goals more successfully than ever.

Indeed, despite its dynamic capabilities, long-distance touring is still the Jag's forte, with ride quality sufficient to keep your head and whatever newspaper you may be reading in the backseat moving imperceptibly. As important as anything are the seats. Several hours-long stints in the driver, front passenger and rear seats confirmed a key impression. So satisfactory is seat comfort that one simply forgets about it.

Function

Having two feet in modernity means providing the XJ customer with the interface contemporary consumers take for granted. Advanced display technology and iPod-influenced ergonomics are manifested in the XJ's 12.3-inch high-definition Virtual Instruments, which complement an innovative, dual-view technology 8-inch touchscreen that can project DVD movies to the passenger while the driver views vehicle functions or follows satellite navigation. It all works in the brightest of sunshine and can be figured out with a bit of intuitive fiddling.

The touchscreen interface is effective but it invariably gets smeared with greasy fingerprints and requires a longer glance than simple dials. Steering-wheel-mounted controls and a few console buttons/dials help you quickly issue simple commands. While we think the rotary gearshift shared with the [XF](#) and the [XK](#) is novel, its operation requires some getting used to. More than once when backing up, we inadvertently shifted the transmission into Sport mode rather than drive. A careless twiddle of the knob can also shift the tranny into neutral.

The leather-wrapped dash is dominated by twin center air vents reminiscent of the twin afterburners of a Navy Tomcat fighter jet. Door accents (wood or carbon-fiber) are pleasant to view and impart a nouveau-chic ambience. Interior storage nooks are generally well-placed and ample enough. The 18.4-cubic-foot trunk will swallow two large bags side by side, and you never feel too close to your fellow occupants. Airlinerlike seatback tray tables in the LWB model give the 2011 Jaguar XJ a biz-jet feel. Overall interior visibility is effective, with the cockpit brightened by a panoramic glass roof. However, like so many modern vehicles, the XJ has vision-blocking A-pillars, which can make it tough to look through a corner.



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The new XJ's rear styling has proven polarizing, with some critics suggesting that it has a French feel to it.
(photo by: Jaguar Land Rover North America LLC)



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In naturally aspirated form, Jaguar's new 5.0 liter V8 makes 385 horsepower and 380 pound-feet of torque in the XJ.
(photo by: Jaguar Land Rover North America LLC)

Design/Fit and Finish

The 2011 XJ's exterior hasn't grown on everyone just yet. Airflow (the XJ is the most aerodynamic Jaguar ever, the company claims) and the application of computational fluid dynamics contributed to designer Ian Callum's shape that successfully blends muscularity with an elegant roof line. However, while the front of the XJ looks like a modern Jaguar, the rear seems vaguely French. It's a slightly confusing visual.

Jaguar's new flagship is beautifully built, though. Panel gaps and sheet metal profiles are tidy and light-catching. The interior is sophisticated, with a decided "money" feel about it and a Bowers & Wilkins sound system that does Beethoven proud. What the exterior and interior highlight most, however, is difference. The XJ is manifestly different from its predecessors and its rivals. Its distinctiveness is perhaps its most salient selling point.

Who Should Consider This Vehicle

High-end luxury sedan buyers want it both ways. They want to be noticed but they only want so much attention. The XJ will appeal on both fronts but add a third. It should attract independent thinkers, folks who want style with driving brio in a package that evokes greater warmth than most of its European rivals and greater dynamism than its Far East counterparts. For them, the 2011 Jaguar XJ is an appropriate vessel with which to say good-bye to all that.

Others To Consider

[Audi A8](#), [BMW 7 Series](#), [Lexus LS 460](#), [Mercedes-Benz S-Class](#).

The manufacturer provided Edmunds this vehicle for the purposes of evaluation.

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