# All Wheel Drive Jaguar XE Road Test

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The Cat gets sharp claws… All wheel drive option for the Jaguar XE saloon's line-up.

By David Miles (Miles Better News Agency.

When Jaguar launched their XE four door compact executive saloon car range in 2015 it was heralded as a 'game-changer' for the brand. It filled the long-held gap left in the brand's range following the exit of the unloved X-Type put out to grass in 2009.

The XE was a must-have for the brand, especially in the fleet and business user-chooser market sector where the Audi A4, BMW 3 Series and Mercedes C-Class dominate premium brand sales, with the Ford Mondeo and Vauxhall Insignia picking up non-premium brand buyers.

The XE proved its worth, becoming Jaguar's best-selling model range, but that has recently marginally changed with the arrival of the F-Pace SUV which uses the XE drivetrain, AWD system and platform. With the continued demand for the XE, plus the arrival of the F-Pace, and the demand for the larger XF, XJ saloons and F-Type sports cars, Jaguar reached a record year for UK sales in 2016 with registrations up by a massive 45% to reach a total of 34,822 sales, good news for post Brexit Britain and UK jobs. News recently confirmed as in 2016 Jaguar Land Rover was the UK's largest car manufacturer, building 544,401 vehicles with 80% of production exported to 136 global markets. It has also been a good start for 2017 with January's Jaguar UK sales up by 19.6% and Land Rovers by 17.7%.

But the market doesn't stand still and the competition gets stronger, so it has become a process of continually enhancing model ranges. The all-important XE has also had recent specification changes as well as the AWD option. These include the latest InControl Pro infotainment system with its 10.2-inch tablet style touchscreen which provides fast response times and intelligent navigation. There is also Wi-Fi connection for up to eight devices plus an Apple Watch app offers remote functions including a fuel level check, remote engine start and lock and unlock functions. The comprehensive driver assistance functions are added to with Lane Keep Assist, Adaptive Speed Limiter and Driver Condition Monitor.

XE on the road prices start from £26,900 with the option of Jaguar Land Rovers own 2.0 litre Ingenium turbodiesel engines with 163 and 180 hp outputs or 2.0 litre turbo petrol units with 200 or 240 hp, and at the top of the range is a 3.0 litre, V6 supercharged 340 hp petrol unit.  The turbodiesels are available with manual or automatic gearboxes whilst the petrol units have auto gearboxes as standard. The AWD option is only available with the 180 hp turbodiesel and automatic transmission. Jaguar expect around 10% of UK customers to choose the AWD option but it is a growing sector of the market with 4×4 passenger cars

increasing in demand. BMW, for instance, say that 20% of those choosing one of their passenger cars – not including their SUVs, will order their xDrive option and of course Audi are well known for their quattro sales, eight million of them globally in 35 years.

The XE specification levels, which depend upon the engine chosen, are SE, Prestige, R-Spot, Portfolio and S. The 180 hp turbodiesel AWD drivetrain is available with Prestige, R-Sport and Portfolio specification.

The AWD system adds £1,800 to the price of the XE over rear wheel drive models. Not only does AWD add to the price, but also the fuel economy suffers, as do CO2 emissions. The XE 2.0 litre 180 hp turbodiesel with AWD and eight-speed auto gearbox costing £37,225 has an official Combined Cycle fuel economy figure of 60.6 mpg but without AWD it is 67.3 mpg. CO2 is 123 g/km but only 111 g/km for the rear wheel drive version. That means the AWD version VED road tax costs £0 First Year then £110 after that as opposed to £0 and then £30. Those all important company car drivers will pay 24% Benefit-in-Kind tax whilst the rear wheel drive users will pay 22%.  Performance figures are virtually the same for both, 140 mph and zero to 62 mph is 7.9 seconds, insurance is the same as well at Group 27E.

However the VED and BIK figures quoted only apply until the end of March this year.  As from 1 April all new cars sold after that date have new tax ratings with increased costs but the AWD will still be more expensive to buy and run and beware of the new £40k cap on the price of new cars. Stray above that figure and VED after the initial First Year rate has an additional £310 a year rate for the next five years. My test car showcased an array of options which pushed the price up to £45,970, well above the future £40k threshold so choose what extra cost options you actually need, not what it would be nice to have.  Better still buy one now before the 1 April 2017.

The recent driving conditions of snow, ice and mud covered roads, plus crumbling frost affected tarmac, proved a suitable testing ground for my sharp-clawed XE 2.0 180 hp AWD with Portfolio specification.

The Jaguar AWD system is basically the same as used first for the high performance F-Type Coupé and Roadster models as well as the XF large saloon and the F-Pace SUV. It delivers torque to the rear wheels but then automatically to the front wheels only when needed, maintaining its agility and bias as a rear wheel drive sports saloon. The system has Configurable Dynamics, allowing the driver to tailor the car's character by selecting individual settings for throttle response, gearchange shifts and continuously variable damping. It can also be selected to lock AWD in use all the time for negotiating snow and muddy road, track and field parking situations.

Core to the AWD system is a transfer case with a multi-plate wet clutch pack and chain drive to the front propshaft, allowing it to move from its standard rear wheel drive application to additional front wheel traction in 165 milliseconds. How much torque is transferred and when is controlled by the Intelligent DriveLine Dynamics, which takes data from the car's yaw rate, lateral acceleration and steering wheel sensors and continuously varies the torque provided, depending upon the grip between the tyres and the road. Making it an all weather driving aid even on dry roads the system predicts when the rear wheels are approaching the limit of available traction, and torque is transferred to the front axle for extra grip as well as mitigating oversteer during fast cornering by providing yaw damping.

Certainly it was a significant driving aid on the icy roads I encountered during my week long test driving spell with the car. For me as a country dweller it would easy to justify the extra purchase and running costs but for those drivers that live in less rustic areas and commute on well treated Winter roads it would be less appealing. But that said the AWD system does provide more grip all the year round for enthusiastic driving.

The system works really well in conjunction with the eight-speed silky smooth automatic transmission and the Jaguar Land Rover 2.0 litre Ingenium turbodiesel engine. The quality of the XE's build restricts the 'grumble' of this four cylinder 180 hp turbodiesel unit. It provides a punchy 430 Nm (317 lb.ft) of torque from 1,750 rpm, giving refined driving at all speeds and a rapid amount of acceleration, just under eight seconds for zero to 62 mph. As for fuel economy, officially the XE AWD sports saloon should return 60.6 mpg and during my week long test driving, mostly done with ECO mode selected, the figure was only 42.1 mpg but the weather was really cold so that would have had some bearing on fuel usage.  High speed motorway cruising was effortless and for the record the top speed is twice that of the national 70mph maximum speed limit.

In all other respects the latest XE, with its new infotainment and connectivity technology, is a polished good looking performer. It still isn't the roomiest saloon in its sector for rear seat passengers, with not enough rear seat legroom for adults on long journeys, and the low

roofline is restrictive for taller passengers in the rear. In addition the low doorframe headroom doesn't help getting in and out of the car for both front and rear passengers.

However, nobody can grumble about the quality of the interior, it is classy in a British sort of way with a beautifully laid out curved fascia panel with the styling lines continuing into the front interior door panels. Centre-stage is the new 10.2-inch touchscreen with its new and faster infotainment and communication functions. The design outside the touchscreen is still 'switch-heavy' and not as clear and unfussy as the latest German brand offerings but it appeals because I like the classy retro 'Britishness' of the design. The only real pain was having to use the touchscreen to turn on and adjust the settings of the heated front seats and the distribution of the air flow into the car.

My test car came with a considerable amount of extra cost options but as the Portfolio specification is already high I wouldn't be delving into the extra cost list of options apart for the heated door mirrors at £275 and heated windscreen at £310. I certainly wouldn't take up the 19-inch alloy wheel option because the larger wheels and the low profile tyres provide a poorer ride quality than Jaguar saloon owners deserve.

## VERDICT

The XE might no longer be the best selling Jaguar model range overall but it handles really well, it provides a high amount of kerb appeal, it has a beautifully styled interior, if not exactly very roomy in the rear, and it is more exclusive than its high volume German

competitors.

For: High kerb appeal, top quality interior design, even better equipped with the improved infotainment and connectivity functions, keen handling supported by the AWD system option – but at a price.

Against: For most users it's hard to justify the extra cost of the AWD option and the higher tax and running costs, stingy rear leg room, adding too many of those extra cost options will push it into a much higher VED road tax band from 1 April this year.

Milestones and Wheels-Alive Tech. Spec. in Brief:

## Jaguar XE 2.0d 180 hp Portfolio, AWD, 4-Door executive compact saloon.

Price: £37,225 (£45,970 as tested).

Engine/transmission: 2.0 litre, four cylinder Ingenium turbodiesel, 180 hp, 430 Nm (271 lb.ft) of torque from 1,750 rpm, eight speed automatic with AWD.

Performance: 140 mph, 0-62 mph 7.9-seconds.

Fuel consumption: Combined Cycle 60.6 mpg, (42.1 mpg on test).

Emissions and taxation: CO2 123 g/km, VED road tax £0/£110, BIK company car tax 24%. Insurance Group: 27E.

Warranty: Three years/unlimited mileage.

Dimensions/capacities: L 4,672 mm (15.33 ft), W 1,850 mm (6.07 ft), H 1,416 mm (4.65 ft), boot 455 litres (16.07 cu.ft), four doors/four to five seats.