Hot off the press – Jaguar’s E-Pace First Impressions

Published: November 22, 2017

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Online version: https://www.wheels-alive.co.uk/hot-off-the-press-jaguars-e-pace-first-impressions/



Jaguar's compact E-Pace first test drive

By Robin Roberts (and Miles Better News Agency).

Everyone loves a cub, at least that's what Jaguar is hoping for with the arrival of its new smaller SUV next month. It will be the first production Jaguar ever not to be built in the UK with production taking place in Austria and China.

In the UK it will be sold in one five-door, five-seat body-shape in E-Pace and E-Pace R-Dynamic styles, with different chassis settings and front and rear styling, together with S, SE and HSE specification packs, and five powertrains; prices range from £28,500 to £50,710.

Engines are the familiar JLR 2.0 four cylinder turbo-diesel and turbo-petrol units with 150, 180 and 240 hp or 249 and 300 hp outputs respectively.

The two lower powered engines can be ordered with six speed manual gearboxes if preferred, but they can be specified like the rest with intelligent all wheel drive nine speed automatic transmission. The entry-level model is front wheel drive only with the 150 hp engine.

A First Edition limited number for the initial 12-months will showcase the new Jaguar E-Pace and offers the 180 hp diesel version for £47,800 or 249 hp petrol variant for £50,160, both with ZF autoboxes and based on the upper R-Dynamic performance chassis with mid-range SE pack, but others can be ordered as well.

The emphasis of engineers and designers was style, comfort and a high degree of WiFi compatibility and connectivity, delivered with Jaguar’s sporting flair and, for the majority of versions, the assured ability of 4WD derived from its seven decades of Land Rover experience.



Jaguar has set out to make the E-Pace the model for today's in-touch drivers and many of its features would be familiar to users of more sophisticated mobile phones, tablets and computers, with a 10-inch touchscreen for most secondary controls along with a customisable 12.3-inch digital display infront of the driver. There are up to five USB points and four 12v outlets with 4G WiFi, link to driver's wearable technology and a full colour head up display on the move.

The intelligent Active Driveline power train uses JLR grip control and advanced chassis dynamics to maximise grip and in AWD versions it decides how to shift around the power, even operating a front wheel drive mode to optimise economy whenever possible, or sending it to the back wheels alone. Drivers can choose their preferred settings for throttle, steering, transmission and suspension across four modes, normal, dynamic, eco and winter with the grip control taking care of progress in go-slow conditions.

Practicality shows in the immense amount of large compartments throughout the car for storage – and not annoying small spaces from where things fall out as you corner. The loadbed floor has no discernable edge and is of a good shape and size, even without folding the offset split rear seats.

The JLR off-road experience shows with a 50 cm (1.64 ft) wading depth to protect vital components and short overhangs front and back to cross rough ground, while also giving it a wheel at each corner for good handling.

The interior uses soft Windsor leather and the seats are highly adjustable, comfortable and securely locate occupants.







Over 150 prototype E-Pace models were built and tested over two years in the hottest deserts to the coldest winters, and even in Walters Arena, South Wales to evaluate the responsiveness and strength of its chassis and suspension systems.



First impressions

Jaguar has entered a cat-fight with its new cub. After its outstanding debut of the bigger F-Pace which won numerous industry awards, the “cub”, which takes its nickname from the engineers working concept, is a entering the compact SUV sector. A silhouette design of a mother Jaguar and her cub has been incorporated into the windscreen and that image shines on the ground via the puddle light system.

Saying the smaller E-Pace combines sports car handling with SUV practicalities is easy, but delivering on that is much tougher and Jaguar has made a good stab at it.

We drove two versions of the newcomer, a full 300 hp petrol HSE and 180 hp diesel First Edition and their powertrains are very smooth, handling agile and roadholding very good.

We found their room was reasonable for four but it would be a squeeze for three in the back. The front seats had good adjustment for occupants who would have no problem

stowing a lot of items for any journey, thanks to enormous bins, trays and door pockets, while the boot space was also generous and easy to load or empty.

With the automatic box we thought the car actually better responded in the manual mode when you needed to make rapid progress and used the intermediate ratios.

The handling and responsiveness did vary quite a bit depending on the chosen driving mode but even more so with regard to the ride comfort. The 20-inch wheels and tyres on the test cars displayed a sometimes bumpy and stiff character on B-class country roads, even in the Comfort setting, and the quicker feedback in Dynamic seemed better suited to smoothing out irregularities of surface.



VERDICT

It was not the overall ride quality we expected from a Jaguar, more akin to that of some Germany rivals, so the E-Pace will have its work cut out to convince anyone familiar with these existing challengers that they should switch to the British brand's newcomer for a smoother ride.

However, I expect there will be conquest sales because it's a new Jaguar after all and has a certain cache attached to that name and, let's face it, most people fall in love with a cub.

For: Room, equipment, handling, economy.

Against: Ride quality, performance in auto-mode, not built in Britain.

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

Jaguar E-Pace First Edition, 2.0 180 turbodiesel, R-Dynamic SE 4WD.

Price: £47,800.

Engine/transmission: 2.0 litre Ingenium 180 hp four cylinder, nine speed automatic, 4WD.

Performance: 127mph, 0–62mph: 9.3-seconds.

Fuel consumption: 40.3 mpg on test.

Emissions and taxation: CO2 147g/km, VED road tax £200 First Year rate then £140 Standard Rate + £310 each year for 5-years as the price is over £40k, BiK company car tax 31%.

Insurance Group: 28E.

Warranty: Three years/unlimited mileage.

Dimensions/capacities: L 4.40 m (14.44 ft), W 1.99 m (6.53 ft), H 1.65 m (5.41 ft), boot/load space 577–1,234 litres (20.38–43.58 cu.ft), kerb weight 1,843 kg (4,063 lb).