Jaguar XF Sportbrake

Published: April 5, 2013

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Online version: https://www.wheels-alive.co.uk/jaguar-xf-sportbrake/



Chris Adamson reports:

Since the demise of the X Type Estate, Jaguar has been deficient in terms of a large load carrier, something they have now rectified with the arrival of the exciting new five-door version of the XF saloon.

Because this is Jaguar and it has heritage to call on, they badge their elegant XF estate as the Sportbrake and just as the name suggests it oozes style by the bucket load.

Another master creation from premier designer Ian Callum, the XF Sportbrake, which is just 5mm longer than the saloon, is new from the B-Pillar rearwards.

A strong silver signature line runs the length of the car while the C-Pillar is finished in gloss black, a trait shared with the XJ saloon, while slim rear light units extend into a strong chrome cross-member that dominates the rear of the car.

As well as form it has function so that back seat occupants get 48mm of extra headroom due to a flatter roof line – and then there is the boot.

Although only class average when it comes to luggage volume, the Sportbrake can still handle 550 litres with the rear seats in place, increasing to 1,675 litres with the seats folded. It also has useful side cubby compartments and set into the boot floor is a panel that splits into three sections to accommodate smaller loads.

Remote fold levers are mounted within the boot area to lower the rear seats and the compartment itself is wide and long, with few interruptions – although ultimately the shallow floor detracts from its flexibility.

This is compensated for with additional storage space under the boot floor, while the central part of the floor can be folded in half and locked in the upright position to stop smaller items rolling around.

Powerful LEDs throw a pool of light onto the ground when the boot is open, while the tailgate itself can be opened and closed using powered struts, and there is a soft close function.

Inside it’s all very familiar XF territory with the friendly welcome of the rotating air vents and rising rotary transmission control from the centre console the moment you press the starter button.

Some commentators have been critical of the quality of the materials and the padding on the seating but I must say I wasn’t disappointed; the XF is noted for being well equipped and the Sportbrake is the same.

SIX TRIM LEVELS TO CHOOSE FROM

The XF Sportbrake comes in six trim levels and you can expect features such as soft grain leather upholstery, dual zone climate control, automatic headlights and wipers, rear parking

sensors, a touch screen display for the audio, navigation and vehicle diagnostics, and a CD/DVD audio with Bluetooth, USB and iPod connectivity on most models.

Optional items include adaptive cruise control, adaptive Xenon headlamps, rear parking camera, blind spot monitor, 19 inch alloy space saver spare wheel, detachable tow bar, heated leather steering wheel and a ski-hatch.

DIESEL ONLY POWER PLANTS

When it comes to engine options there is only one fuel source and that's diesel, but there are two capacities: a 2.2-litre four cylinder and a 3.0-litre six-cylinder, with two power outputs for each unit – so there is a 163bhp and a 200bhp version of the four pot and 240bhp and 275bhp versions of the V6.

Each of the engines directs drive through the rear wheels via an advanced and smooth flowing ZF eight-speed automatic gearbox which has a wide ratio spread, meaning that it can purr along at just 1,650rpm – and all the engines feature automatic stop-start to boost fuel economy.

The mainstay is the entry level turbocharged 163bhp example which is on test here and while it may not be as spectacular as some it does have plenty of pep and is a comfortable cruiser. Jaguar claims close on 55mpg should be possible but with some enthusiastic use, particularly of the paddle shifts, this is going to plummet closer to 30mpg so be careful.

A sporting handling character has been one of the XF's main attributes and that continues in the Sportbrake. The major difference being that the estate gets self-levelling suspension to manage varying weights and keep the car level even when fully laden.

It appears as neat and finely poised as the saloon although some may find the ride quality a tad on the firm side but, for me, it perfectly fits the character and the electrically assisted steering is nicely weighted.

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VERDICT – GOOD LOOKS AND GOOD PERFORMANCE

If you are looking for a large bulk carrier then you will probably be more drawn towards Jaguar's Germanic rivals, but if you want a good looking, slippery estate car with lots of character and effortless driving then the XF Sportbrake has to be a strong contender. Prices start at £31,940 and rise to £51,504 – around £2,000 more than the equivalent XF saloons.

WHEELS-ALIVE TECH. SPEC. IN BRIEF

Jaguar XF Sportbrake 2.2D 163bhp SE

Engine: 2179cc turbocharged i4 diesel, eight speed automatic transmission, rear wheel drive
Power: 163bhp @3,500rpm
Torque: 400 Nm @ 2,000rpm
Top Speed: 124mph
0-62mph: 10 seconds
Fuel Consumption:

Urban – 46.3mpg
Extra urban – 62.8mpg
Combined – 54.3mpg
Emissions: 139g/km (VED Band E)