

Review: 2011 Jaguar XJL

by [Zach Bowman](#) on Aug 18th 2010 at 11:57AM **FEATURED** **REVIEW**

Lightweight-Luxury-with-Style



2011 Jaguar XJL - Click above for high-res image gallery

There's a sect of motoring nihilists out there who would have us all believe there isn't a single thing in the automotive universe that hasn't been done before. It's the "**Simpsons did it**" meme on methamphetamines, though instead of a yellow animated family, our cast is populated by the likes of Plymouth, Cord, Studebaker, Hudson and any number of other equally innovative yet forgotten brands. Think adaptive headlights are a trick piece of tech? Think again – Willys-Knight employed a third directional headlight as early as 1928 on its 70A, and Citroën made use of similar methodology on cars like the DS and SM way back when.

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Few segments seem to have accepted this grim reality quite like the luxury sedan world. Automakers that once strove to create unique products now seem to be operating from the same design template. Line up the profiles of the **BMW 7 Series**, **Audi A8** and the **Mercedes-Benz S-Class**, and the vast majority of the car-buying public would have no idea which car was which. Each vehicle is attractive in its own right, but we wouldn't accuse any of them possessing the same kind of gravitas as, say, a '38 Mercedes-Benz 770.

Which is one of the big reasons we're smitten with the 2011 **Jaguar XJL**. Whereas the only way you're going

to stop traffic with a 7 Series is to put the drivers around you to sleep, the newest interpretation of the stately Jaguar flagship is the kind of beauty that sends jaws clattering across the concrete.

The design evolution of the XJ line has been downright glacial since the car first debuted in 1968. With its quad headlights, squared but forward-leaning grille and well-shaped tail, the company's designers realized they penned one of the world's most iconic shapes and left it at that. For nearly 40 years, the car remained always within arm's reach of the original look – swapping headlights here, adding a few more curves there, but never straying too far from what made the XJ, well, an XJ.

So when **Jaguar** announced it had something special planned for 2011, most of us auto journo types expected a revised engine and maybe a few tweaks to the car's exterior, or perhaps a scaled-up **XF**. What we got instead was something much more special – a clean-slate redesign of one of the world's most easily identifiable sedans.



Jaguar started by penning the long-legged XJL first, then subtracted nearly five inches out of the wheelbase to create the standard XJ. That helps to explain why the larger of the two sedans seems so proportional compared to its competition. Typically, designers put pen to paper on the short-wheelbase version before stretching the design for limousine products, but with the XJL you're rewarded with what the designers intended from the get go.

That includes a long, arching roofline that's can't be described as anything but beautiful. As drivers and not designers, we tend to avoid heaping praise on a vehicle's sheetmetal, but if the look of the XJL doesn't stir

something primal in the pit of your stomach, you might want to check your pulse. Up front, the XJL lifts a few design elements from its smaller sibling, the XF, but mixes in an extra helping of aggression for good measure. With a set of glowering headlamps dominated by projection lenses and accented by LED daytime running lights and a bullish, upright grille, the face of this car fills rearview mirrors like a bouncer fills a doorway.



We were notoriously displeased with the blacked-out C-pillars on the XJL during our **First Drive**, but after a week with the car, we have to say they don't really confront us with the same vehemence. We're guessing that's partly due to the fact that we have a hard time pulling our retinas off of those sculpted taillights and similarly curvaceous rump. We've heard all of the noise saying that the look was swiped from **Bentley** or the French, but in the flesh, the XJL makes those tilted lamps its own.

Inside, the 2011 XJL is fitted with the kind of interior that can make you resent your proletariat upbringing. Every surface is wrapped in supple leather, stitched with the kind of loving care that only the English can supply. Surprisingly enough, the front seats are built with firm, supportive bolsters that kept us from sliding around the hide-lined cabin like dead fish – something unexpected in a vehicle of this size. The XJL wears a dash that's a vast expanse of double-stitched cow skin dominated by two large, aeronautical-looking air vents. Those vents boast chrome accents that double as airflow shut off knobs – the kind of mechanical detail that makes us wish every manufacturer had a budget for cleverness.



Rear passengers enjoy the kind of leg room that sufferers of economy class can only dream about. As a friend pointed out, the average owner of an XJL likely spends very little time behind the wheel. He's probably right. But while the front seats are no bad place to spend time thanks to their massage, heating and cooling surfaces, it's the back bench that offers up a new class of travel. With enough space to comfortably orient your legs any way that behooves you and seats that are more comfortable than a fair portion of the nation's furniture, we might have to look into finding a driver for ourselves.

That feeling is amplified when trying to master the mysterious touchscreen on the 2011 XJL. We've never found ourselves pining for the simple torture of the **BMW** iDrive until now. Keying in locations, radio stations or climate control settings requires the kind of patience that only comes from having multiple financial institutions named after your forebearers. After about five minutes of frustrated screen mashing, we eventually retired to the back seat, where we curled up and cried ourselves to sleep.

Fine, it's not quite that bad, but considering the MSRP on this big kitty, we'd like to see tech that's at least a little quicker on the draw.



Fortunately, the XJL has a comforting balm to soothe all aneurysms derived from matching wits with the navigation system – the drivetrain. Our particular car was fitted with the base 5.0-liter V8 engine, complete with 385 horsepower and 380 pound-feet of torque. Paired with a six-speed automatic gearbox, the engine has no problem generating speed for this mammoth four-door. Despite being longer than the Brooklyn bridge (206.6 inches, stem to stern) and wider than the Hudson (74.6 inches, hip to hip), the 2011 Jaguar XJL can hustle to 60 mph in a scant 5.4 seconds according to the company's figures. Judging by the seat of our Dockers, we'd say the sedan is probably quicker, if just by a few fractions of a second.

How is it possible to have a car of this size scoot to 60 in such short order? For starters, the XJL weighs nothing, or at least as close to nothing as a sedan of these dimensions can weigh. Despite its proportions, the four-door hits the bathroom scale at a mere 4,131 pounds. Just for comparison's sake, that's 245 pounds lighter than the considerably smaller **BMW 550i**.

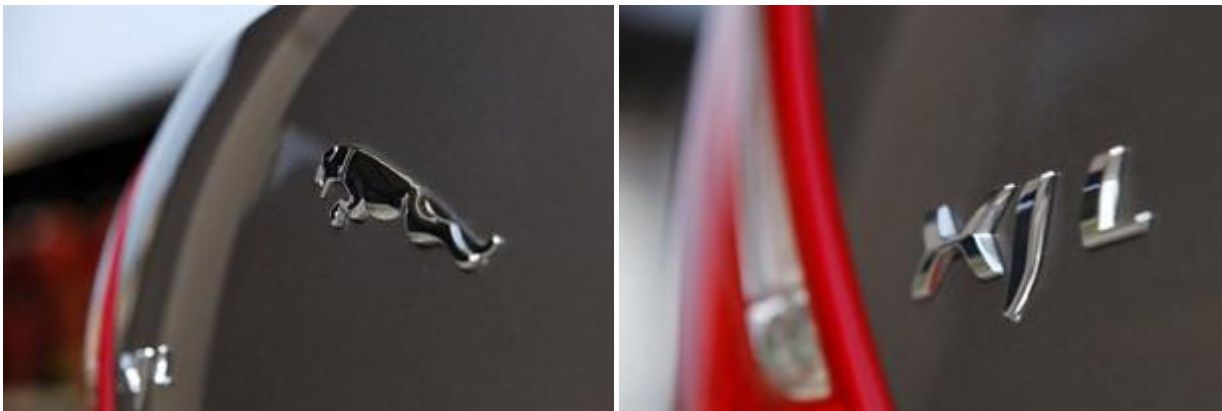
Jaguar made our holiday card list for that reason alone.



Not surprisingly, the engineers managed to pull off the ultimate Jenny Craig by building as many of the XJL's components as possible out of aluminum or magnesium alloy. In fact, you can name the sedan's steel chassis and body components on one hand even if you'd lost two digits. The company says that of all the body and chassis structure, just the door hinges, trunk hinges and side impact beams are steel.

That philosophy was carried over into the suspension as well. The 2011 XJL wears forged aluminum unequal-length wishbones up front to keep unsprung weight to a minimum. Likewise, the front brake calipers are made of the same material to keep the pounds off, and as a result, you're rewarded with a driving experience that feels lighter than its girth would suggest.

While the rest of the world may know that a large car doesn't have to handle like a half-melted marshmallow, here in the States, big means just one thing – float like a butterfly and leave the stinging for your employees to handle. But the 2011 XJL simply doesn't ascribe to that philosophy. Even safely away from the XJ's Dynamic Mode, turn-in is surprisingly sharp for a vehicle this long. Really start sawing on the wheel, and you'll quickly be introduced to the expected understeer, but this thing is a luxury chauffer-mobile, not a track-bred heathen. It's easy to forget that you could be lugging around a dignitary, their spouse and all of the imperial china while leaning on that big eight-cylinder engine and aiming for an apex.



Thanks to the miraculously low curb weight of the 2011 XJL, the brakes have no problem scrubbing off speed in a hurry. The stoppers aren't oversized, just perfectly matched to the capabilities of the engine and chassis. We typically expect to be yanking on the reigns for a country mile before something of this size comes to a stop, but the big Jaguar simply sheds its speed without bellyaching.

Click the XJL into Dynamic Mode and you're rewarded with slightly sharper throttle response and a tendency for the transmission to hold its gear well into the rev band. It's fun, sure, but we're thinking that the trick would be more at home on the supercharged version of the sedan. We tended to just leave Dynamic Mode off and enjoy the XJL's comfortable cruising ability. Point the kitty's nose toward the horizon and this four-door is more than happy to soak up mile after mile of interstate with a suspension that's just this side of soft.



Jaguar has priced the naturally aspirated XJL starting at \$78,650, though our tester was optioned up to \$85,700 with the addition of a mind-melting Bowers-Wilkins sound system as well as a few other technological and creature comfort wonders. From down here in the realm of the auto-journo salary, that's a mountain of dollar bills, but if we were shopping amongst the pillars of limousine luxury out there, the car's MSRP is actually more than reasonable. For equal money we could just as easily slip into a 7 Series or the like, but why bother?

In a world dominated by variations on the same theme, the 2011 XJL is as close to shrugging off the bland, conservative lines of the luxury sedan as you're apt to find. With its lightweight body, capable 5.0-liter V8 and an interior that will swaddle you in all of the niceties that money can buy, this is a car that satisfies all of the prerequisites for a high-dollar automobile while still striking its own chord. Is it a brand-new recipe for luxury driving? No, not entirely, but it's different enough to woo us without breaking a sweat.

Eat that, nihilists.

Second Opinion: 2011 Jaguar XJL

by Chris Paukert

Bowman has it right – the new Jaguar XJL is a deliciously hedonistic and competent luxury craft, and it has comfortably nabbed the top spot in the premium sedan market for me (though I admittedly have yet to sample the new **Audi A8**).

For perhaps the first time ever, it's perfectly reasonable to view the Jaguar XJ as not just an excellent car, but an excellent value as well. Standard equipment levels are beyond generous – in fact, with items like a dual-pane moonroof, lane-departure warning, navigation, quad-zone climate control and power sunshades as standard-fit on the \$79,500 XJL, the Germans look like they're plying base-level taxi cabs in comparison.

The XJ is an athletic and sparkingly luxurious driver, and it's more than fairly priced.

Yes, Jaguar continues to need to update its infotainment system with faster processor speeds, as just about everything from accessing a satellite radio station to inputting an address is a frustratingly deliberate exercise, but the way Jaguar has deftly incorporated a raft of high-tech features into a cabin that delivers its traditional wood-and-leather values is nothing short of graceful. In fact, it's my leading candidate for interior of the year, with a richness and design that rivals its British brethren that carry MSRPs upwards of double (or triple) this Jag.

To Coventry's credit, it hasn't simply just scaled-up the XF's (successful) interior, it's given the XJ a look all its own, with a full-perimeter band of veneer that looks sensational, bullseye vents that sit proud of the center stack like artful little turbines, and a gorgeously crisp TFT display for the gauge binnacle that is easy-to-read in any light.

Any gripes? Aside from the slow-access infotainment, not much. I might recommend plumping for wheels larger than the standard-pattern 19-inch alloys – especially on the long-wheelbase model as they tend to look a bit undersized. I still find the blacked-out rear pillar to be gimmicky, but I'd order my XJ in Ultimate Black Metallic, book an appointment with my local dealer's paint booth or forget about it altogether.

Either way, even in its heaviest and least-powerful form, the XJ is an athletic and sparkingly luxurious driver, and it's more than fairly priced. Cool Britannia is back.