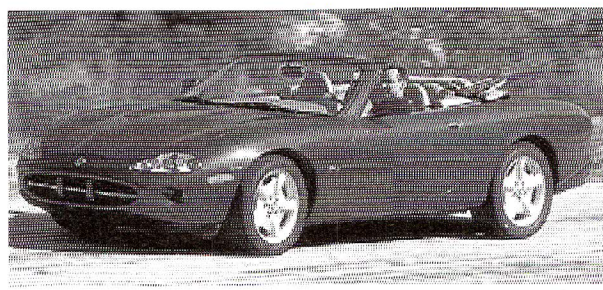


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## 1997 Jaguar XK8 - Long-Term Wrap-Up

### True Grand Touring With Feline Grace

From the April, 2008 issue of Motor Trend / By Jeff Bartlett / Photography by Jeff Bartlett, Randy Lorentzen

Almost every one of the Jaguar XJS platform's nine lives were used up in the long, 21-year product cycle leading up to the sleek and sultry XK8. With time on their side, Jaguar designers and engineers had ample opportunity to create a worthy successor to not only the veteran XJS, but to the legendary XK120 and XK E coupes.

From our first auto show peek at the graceful body, we were enamored with the delicate lines and alluring promise of world-class, open-air motoring. We secured a Carnival Red example to test the Coventry cat over a year's time, evaluating its luxury cachet, sporting flair, and liveability. Base price rang in just shy of \$70,000 with a host of standards expected in this premium range: V-8 engine, real wood and leather trim, security system, and power everything, from motorized top to built-in garage door opener. Top-flight features such as driver memory system, electrochromatic rearview mirror, and stability control further elevate the hedonistic motoring experience into the realm of pure luxury.

Selected options were limited to a premium sound package (\$1800) and an all-weather package (\$2000) preparing the car for pleasurable, worry-free weekend escapades. The grand total tallied \$74,310 for our long-terms, close to the \$72,000 average reported by survey owners. Clearly the choice of an elite clientele, three out of four respondents purchased their convertibles outright. Average monthly payments for those who financed was \$1337, with the range spanning from a reasonable \$500 a month to a bank-breaking \$3794. And, once again, the claim that a high percentage of luxury vehicles are leased is disproved by our random survey, with 93.1 percent choosing to purchase.

Typically male, with the median age hovering in the mid-50s, the average surveyed owner lives in a two-person household with four vehicles to share transportation and cruise duties. Consequently, those surveyed reported a low 5553-mile average annual mileage, which may explain why owners were generally less critical than MT staffers who drove the long term ragtop on daily commutes and weekend adventures, clocking twice the mileage.

Looking deeper into our buyer profile, we find that 25 percent are prior Jag owners, yet only one in 10 was influenced by the British heritage. Appearance was the overwhelming purchasing influence, and much credit is due to Chief Stylist Geoff Lawson for his inspiring design. Combining marquee cues with modern flair, the resulting body purrs with grace, class, and timeless beauty. An Ohio attorney wrote, "A styling smash. I always find people standing around my car. Unfortunately, I often find fingerprints on the car; people just have to touch the lines." And an artist reported, "I get more attention than I ever received with any previous auto." Most owners found this a worthwhile concession.

We wish the convertible top could be tucked under a smooth tonneau, like the much less expensive Chevrolet Corvette and Porsche Boxster. At nearly \$75 grand, such conveniences are expected. Owners agree, with their most frequent suggestion to improve the XK8 being a retractable roof. It soon became clear that the tonneau cover bag is provided for very good reason, as our softtop cover became wrinkled and soiled while simply being stored in the seldom-used trunk. At 9.5 cubic feet, the rear cargo area provided adequate space for light weekend luggage or a modest grocery load, but it had serious limitations—especially with the tonneau onboard.

Beneath the sloping hood lurks the fourth clean-sheet-design powerplant in Jaguar's long history, dubbed the AJ-V8. The 4.0-liter/290-horsepower DOHC engine produces a full 80 percent of its 290 pound-feet torque peak from just 1400 rpm. This 90-degree all-aluminum engine creates a feisty character capable of propelling the 3062-pound two-door 0-60 mph in 7.0 seconds and blasting down the quarter mile in 15.2 seconds at 94.0 mph. Yet, the Jag's demeanor remains both muscular and especially well refined. Extra recognition for the V-8 was given as the second greatest influence on purchasing decisions, supported by 95 percent of those surveyed rating acceleration above average. Some staff members found issue with initial throttle response, citing a slight delay from accelerator input to straight-line reaction. Owners generally do not share this impression, though a small contingent pine for more power, and Jaguar will address this demand with the upcoming supercharged XKR super cat.

Handling is also worshipped by owners, with a full 100 percent rating it above average: a rare engineering bulls-eye worthy of a standing ovation. An Ohio executive wrote, "This is my fifth Jaguar, and this is without a doubt the most solid and best handling." Fresh double wishbone configuration up front and modified double control arms at the rear borrowed from the XJ-Series sedans combine for a fully independent suspension effectively tuned for a sporting balance between ride compliance and raw performance. Contact patches come courtesy of aggressive Pirelli P Zero Asimmetrco 245/50ZR17 tires at each corner, enabling the Jaguar to chase its tail around the skidpad at 0.84 g and permitting a 64.8-mph dance through the 600-foot slalom course.

The MT logbook had its share of praise and jabs, some tempering raw test data. One editor wrote, "The power steering assist feels tailored to the Macy's crowd and gives little feedback during aggressive driving." Another staffer scrawled, "The chassis is fairly stiff with a definite European feel. Unfortunately, the Vette rides better and corners harder, taking much of the shine off this pricey package." Clearly the owners were enamored, but our staff sought more from the solid chassis. To sample the fringes of the XK8's handling potential, we ordered a tire/wheel upgrade to a set of 255/35YR20 P Zeros on BBS RX 20x9 0-inch wheels from The Tire Rack. This cranked the handling up to full volume. The 1.0-inch-wider wheels with a plus 3 tire fitment raised skidpad performance to 0.87 g, with a commensurate gain in slalom speed to a swift 67.0 mph. As expected, the upgraded package proved comfortable on smooth pavement, but rough surfaces exposed notable harshness.

Part of the staff's criticism of the steering is directed at the wheel, which is styled with varnished wood exposed at the 10 and 2 o'clock positions; good looking, but we'd prefer the leather crept further around the wheel to cover those popular hand positions. Tight confines make the XK8 an intimate ride for two with some storage on the back seat, which surely was never intended to hold passengers. Even as a package shelf, the rear bench can barely accommodate a briefcase lying flat. Strangely, 4.1 percent of surveyed owners rated rear-seat comfort as excellent, but the more rational 71 percent found it to be poor. Only 16 percent specifically cite the rear seat as an area that needs improvement. Obviously, few owners ever intend to carry second-row passengers.

While the finely finished wood and superb Connolly cowhide make for an inviting interior, our staff found basic ergonomics lacking. Criticisms include difficulty in finding buttons at night, needing to jab the power window switch to activate express down feature, no apparent door lock control button, tight headroom with top up, absence of dead pedal, and way-too-complicated tripmeter controls. The seats were disliked for the shallow seat bottom, flat contouring, and limited power adjustment range. While we're at it, the light-colored dash on our tester frequently reflected onto the windshield so strongly that even Armani's best sunglasses would barely cut the glare; we'd strongly recommend ordering a darker interior. On the other hand, owners found little to complain about in the XK8, with many reporting that it's a big improvement over the car they traded in (says something about those old XJSs).

Although we nearly doubled the reported owner mileage during our year in the saddle, the MT long-term XK8 had a brief, uneventful service life. The excellent full-color owner's manual recommends servicing at 10,000-mile intervals, but we had our 10K work performed early at 7100 miles. The \$265.48 service included basic fluid/filter replacement and inspections, along with a front-end alignment that added \$90 to the total. While at the dealer, sipping Earl Grey tea, we added an optional wind deflector. In hindsight, this \$716 piece didn't really seem worthwhile for us, though owners who log on serious topless miles might consider it. The XK8 has respectable open-air manners, with little wind noise or bothersome buffeting. The deflector served to reduce the air turbulence, making the XK8 truly pleasurable to drive al fresco. But the screening does reduce rearward vision, as well as eradicate what little rear-seat functionality existed.

After 12 luxurious months commanding the svelte XK8, we can confidently say the fresh design eclipses Jaguar's best-selling sports car ever. Gorgeous looks, communicative chassis, and pampering accouterments all make for a rewarding ride. Our trouble-free year left us without a single quality or reliability complaint, only respect for the beloved cat. Owners expressed their feelings for the XK8 with great passion that speaks well of Jaguar under Ford's umbrella: "Jaguar has done a very masterful job of combining the outstanding qualities of the world's great cars in the XK8"; "Jaguar should be proud because it's not only restored the company's good name, but redefined it"; and "It makes driving just for the sake of driving fun again." We couldn't say it better.

## CONSUMER CHECKLIST

	Yes	No	Opt.
Integrated child seats	0	4	0
Roadside assistance	4	0	0
Security system	4	0	0
Anti-lock brakes	4	0	0
Cupholders	2		
Power outlets	1		
warranty	4 years/50,000 miles		

## MT Thumbs Up

Classic body styling  
Responsive yet compliant suspension  
Quiet top-up interior  
Impressive build quality

## MT Thumbs Down

Horrendous dash-top glare  
Overly isolated steering  
Unightly folded top  
Teletubbie-size back-seat room

## PERFORMANCE/CREATURE COMFORTS AS RATED BY OWNERS

	EXCELLENT	GOOD	AVERAGE	FAIR	POOR
Overall					
performance	80.4%	17.7%	0.6%	0.6%	0.6%
Fun to drive	87.4	12.6	0.0	0.0	0.0
Acceleration	57.9	37.1	3.8	1.3	0.0
Braking	74.2	22.0	2.5	1.3	0.0
Handling	79.9	20.1	0.0	0.0	0.0
Overall comfort	54.7	32.7	7.5	1.3	3.8
Rear-seat comfort	4.1	4.8	6.9	12.4	71.7
Cargo capacity	22.9	28.7	25.5	15.3	7.6
Overall quality	71.1	22.6	2.5	3.1	0.6

## DEALER PRACTICES AS RATED BY OWNERS

	EXCELLENT	GOOD	AVERAGE	FAIR	POOR
Sales practices	61.0%	22.7%	9.1%	1.9%	5.2%
Service practices	64.2	25.0	6.8	2.0	2.0

## OWNERS' REPORTED

## STRENGTHS/WEAKNESSES

## MECHANICAL PROBLEMS

None	80.1%
Yes	19.9

## SPECIFIC LIKES

Style	87.8%
Handling	30.3
Overall performance	20.5
Comfort	9.0
Engine	6.6
Power	6.6

## SPECIFIC DISLIKES

Deck seat	10.7%
Tonneau cover fit	5.7
Lack of power	5.0
Seatbelts	3.8
Ingress/egress	3.1

## OWNERS' VITAL STATISTICS

Surveyed group,	
percentage M/F	66.0/34.0
Average age of owner	53.0
Average purchase price	\$77,080

Average monthly payment	\$1337
Average total mileage	5553
Average fuel economy, mpg	17.3
Percentage buy/lease	93.1/6.9
Average vehicles per household	4.1

## OWNERS' PURCHASE

## CONSIDERATIONS

What influenced you to consider a XK8 Convertible?

Looks/style	91.1%
New AJ-V-8 engine	56.7
Prior Jaguar ownership	43.9
Performance	40.8
Quality	38.2
Handling	36.9
I'd buy another Jaguar	63.5%
I'd recommend the XK8 Conv.	96.8

## PRICE

Base price	\$69,900
Price as tested	\$74,310
"Kelley Blue Book" current value,	
wholesale/retail	\$58,300/\$67,365
Total operating cost	\$1135.35
Operating cost/mile	10.0¢
Total ownership cost*	\$10,145.40
Ownership cost/mile†	68.0¢

## GENERAL/POWERTRAIN

Body style	2+2 convertible
Vehicle config.	Front engine, rear drive
Airbag	Dual
Engine configuration	V-8, DOHC, 4 valves/cylinder
Engine displacement, ci/cc	244/3996
Horsepower, hp @ rpm, SAE net	290 @ 6100
Torque, lb-ft @ rpm, SAE net	284 @ 4200
Transmission	5 speed auto.
Axle ratio	3.00:1

## DIMENSIONS

Wheelbase, in./mm	101.9/2588
Length, in./mm	187.4/4760
Height, in./mm	51.4/1306
Curb weight, lb	3867
Weight distribution, fr, %	51/49
Fuel capacity, gal.	19.0
Fuel economy,	
EPA, city/hwy., mpg	17/24

## CHASSIS

Suspension, fr	Upper and lower control arms, coil springs, and roll bar
	upper and lower control arms, coil springs, anti roll bar
Steering	rack and pinion, power assist
Brakes, fr	ventilated disc/abs, abs
Wheels	1788.0, cast aluminum
Tires	Pirelli P Zero, 245/50ZR17

## PERFORMANCE

Acceleration, 0-60 mph, sec	7.0
Quarter mile, sec/mpg	15.2/94.0
Braking, 60-0 mph, ft	124
Slalom, mph	64.8
Lateral acceleration, g	0.84

## MAINTENANCE

Total mileage	10,581
Test mileage	10,540
Fuel consumed, gal.	656.6
Fuel cost	\$867.37
Average mpg	16.1
Additional oil cost	1 qt/\$2.50
Total maintenance	\$265.48
Problem areas	None

\*Based on "Kelley Blue Book" wholesale price, excluding insurance, tax, title, and registration.

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