

XK8 allure

XK8/R special-intro

Given its massive following, we thought it only right to devote 11 pages of our first 148 page issue to the evergreen XK8 and XKR – a model with an appeal that's yet to show any sign of fading...



For a car that's proved to be such a success, the XK8's public debut was one very nearly shrouded in mist. Destined to be revealed by the lifting of a large 'Jaguar' packing crate at the Geneva show in March 1996, a trial run with dry ice using an XJ-S on the day before the show proved unsuccessful – the car was left with a dull hue over the bodywork!

Come press day proper, the dry ice was a necessary casualty, but otherwise the planned public unveiling of the first XK8 went superbly well. The Jaguar stand was a hubbub of press and interested onlookers, and the car – a coupe with its bonnet locked down as the engine was still a secret at that point – was received very well. The same was true a month later, when the

convertible was unveiled at the New York show. The XK8 had arrived.

In its first year of production over 14,000 examples were built, and the model's appeal was further boosted for performance-minded buyers with the arrival of the supercharged XKR versions in 1998. The naturally-aspirated cars were quick, but the supercharged versions were considerably faster again...

That four model combination of coupe and convertible in naturally-aspirated and supercharged forms continued throughout the model's nine year production run, and though it may have been technically outgunned by newer models from rival manufacturers by the end of its life, the V8-engined XK never lost its allure.

Some 91,406 examples had been built in

total when the last model rolled off the Browns Lane production line on 27 May 2005, and today a well-maintained XK8 or XKR has just as much head-turning ability as it would have when new. That appeal has meant a huge enthusiast following, fed by a wide range of models on the used-market to suit every pocket – and we hope that if you're one of those enthusiasts, the ten pages following this will prove to be a useful reference tool.

As well as an XK8 timeline that charts the model's development during its nine-year production life, we take a look back at the model's genesis leading up to its launch, and we offer pertinent practical advice for anyone who already runs an XK8/R, or anyone considering buying one. Enjoy!

XK8/R – an essential guide



Whether you currently own or are thinking of buying an example of Jaguar's evocative V8-engined GT, our quick reference guide tells you how to avoid the pitfalls and revel in the highs of the XK experience...

The decision has been made; you already own an XK8, or you are about to buy one. Either way, with early examples of Jaguar's 1996-launched GT now approaching classic status and even the last versions having left the production line over three years ago, XK8 buying and owning considerations are changing constantly.

The good news is that while the model is certainly not without its problems, spares availability is excellent and if you choose wisely in the first place and then adhere to a few sensible maintenance rules, XK8 ownership can be quite painless... Choose the wrong car in the first place, however, or skimp on servicing, and just the opposite could occur. So here we'll highlight pertinent maintenance and reliability issues – equally relevant whether you're already an owner or about to buy – plus we'll have a look at the current market situation. Just what can you expect to get for your money?

Engine issues

The early 4.0-litre V8's weaknesses have been well-documented in JWM before but, while we

won't rake over old ground needlessly, it is worth remembering a few key points. Until engine number 000818-1043 when steel liners were introduced (which equates to a build date of 10.43am on 18 August 2000), all Jaguar's V8 engines had Nikasil-lined bores. A combination of short journeys and pre-2000 high-sulphur UK fuel could combine to wear away the Nikasil coating, leading to poor compression and difficult starting. The only solution was engine replacement, and many engine swaps were carried out by Jaguar under warranty.

If you're unsure whether an engine is a Nikasil unit or not, check the number. And if your car or a potential purchase has a Nikasil engine but is running fine, then don't fret unduly – but do get a blow-by compression test done to be sure that it's not suffering from bore wear. Anything up to a figure of 20-litres per minute is quite acceptable and, given that the UK's fuel has been low-sulphur now for eight years, an engine that falls into that category today should continue to perform well.

The other key 4.0-litre weaknesses are timing chain tensioner issues and water pumps. The early type of upper chain tensioners can fail

without warning, leading to a wrecked engine. A second design was better, but only the all-metal cased type introduced with the 4.2-litre engine have proved to be completely reliable. If there's no documentation with a 4.0-litre car to show that the 4.2-litre type tensioners have been retro-fitted, get the job done. A good independent specialist – and there are plenty out there – can replace all the chains (there are four), plus upper and lower tensioners (two of each) for around £1,200. Don't skimp and change the upper tensioners only. Water pumps too have gone through several design changes. By now, the majority of cars should have the latest spec-type – identifiable by its two-piece metal body separated by a black metal gasket – which doesn't shed impeller blades. Again, if that's not the case, get one fitted.

Provided that the chains/tensioners and water pumps are of the latest type, then a regularly serviced 4.0-litre engine should be very reliable. But if those issues are going to keep you awake at night then, other than getting those jobs done, the only solution is to plump for a 4.2-litre car. The larger unit has, thus far, proved to be bomb-proof.

Words: Matt Skelton Pictures: John Colley



Suspension secrets

The XK's ability to produce a refined ride with a sporting edge is one of the car's key points, but only a car that's well-maintained will live up to that high standard. At the front, upper and lower wishbone bushes plus lower damper bushes all take a pounding and, if they aren't replaced when they eventually wear, ride and handling will suffer dramatically. As the suspension needs to be unloaded to check for play, a friendly specialist with a ramp is your best bet to keep a careful eye on things.

Another problem at the front that's becoming an issue are the subframe mounts. From around 40,000 miles or five years and onwards, the rubber in these mounts can begin to separate from the metal leading to the car wandering around the dead-ahead. Again, the car will need to be put on a ramp to check the situation – but replacement should be no more than £250. Lower steering column knock on early cars can also be an issue – fitting a revised all-metal design (around £200) cures this problem once and for all.

At the rear, anti-roll bar drop links can go and, for reasons as yet unexplained, the dampers on actively sprung cars can also give problems at almost any point in their life. A repetitive tapping sound across uneven surfaces at low speeds is the giveaway.

Maintaining motion

Engine and suspension aside, keep an eye on the following points to keep any burgeoning love affair with an XK8 on the right track.

Gearboxes; both the early ZF and Mercedes-sourced five-speeders (the latter being used on XKR's), plus the later XK8/R six-speed ZF units are of the 'sealed for life' type. Changing the oil every 30,000 miles, however, is a good idea for maximum longevity. It's a specialist job, but one worth paying for. For example, Elite and Performance Jags in Derby will change the oil in a ZF five-speed unit for £350, and in a five-speed XKR unit for £168 – the difference in price is down to the XKR's box having a dipstick, so it's much easier to refill. If that still sounds like a lot for an oil change, remember that fitting a recon box will be in the region of £3k.

The underside of any car is also worth paying attention to, especially pre-2002 models as a surprisingly high proportion of these suffer from rot in the front floorpan area due to a design flaw. If there's not any on your car, rust-proof now before there is. Brake lines can corrode around the clip points – if yours are good, apply Waxoyl or similar to keep them that way. And, if you only use your car sparingly but all year round – when you wash it give the sump a dousing too. Exposed to salty roads and then left, it's not unheard of for sumps to go porous. Not good.

If you've a pre-2001 convertible, get the fluid that operates the hood changed. The early type fluid can coagulate causing the hood catch to seize – and that's very expensive to fix. The later type fluid doesn't have the same nasty habit.

Finally, a word or two on brake discs and pads. Clearly, these components are service items – but there's a huge difference in costs between standard and Brembo options. For example, while Elite and Performance charge a very reasonable £375 at the front and £332 at the rear, including fitting, for replacing standard discs and pads with genuine items on both n/a and supercharged cars, the equivalent prices for genuine Brembo discs/pads – excluding fitting – are £750 and £672. Ouch. Pattern discs/pads are available, including those for Brembo set-ups, but quality varies considerably. You pay your money...

Buying choice

As we've already pointed out in the timeline (and it will be worth referring back to that when reading this section), though the XK8 was in production for nine years, on the outside it changed relatively little in that period. Under the skin, however, the car evolved considerably. The result is a wide model choice, and a correspondingly wide differential in prices.

A nationwide search at the time of writing turned up a 1997 XK8 coupe with 145,000 miles

on the clock for sale privately at just £5,900, but anything this cheap should be approached with a healthy degree of caution... Nevertheless, that's not to say that there aren't good examples available below the £10k mark. Also for sale privately and with full Jaguar service history and 93,000 miles showing was another 1997 coupe for £7,995 – a much better bet and, realistically, the point at which the XK8 used-market begins. Though harder to find, convertible naturally-aspirated cars are also available for less than £10k too, as is the odd supercharged XKR coupe. We found a one-owner example with 74,000 miles and full service history for just £9,995.

Between £10-£15k, model choice expands considerably. As well as lower mileage examples of all the derivatives already mentioned, here you'll also find 2001 Model Year facelift XK8 and XKR coupes, plus pre-facelift XKR convertibles. Just over the £15k parapet is a smattering of 4.2-litre XK8 coupes, but you'll need closer to £20k for a convertible or a 4.2 XKR coupe – and you can add another £3k to that if you want your 4.2 XKR to be a drop-top.

The 2004 model year and on facelift cars jump in the desirability stakes once again with naturally-aspirated coupes starting from around £25,000. Again, naturally-aspirated convertibles and XKR coupes command a £3k premium, with XKR convertibles, inevitably, a notch more expensive once more. Top of the tree price wise are the 2006 run-out 4.2-S models. Fully-loaded with goodies, you'll need to part with around £35-£40k for one of these – which is a considerable amount considering that we found a 'new' XK coupe for £40k too...

Of the cars we found for sale, there was a roughly equal mix between private and trade sales. Clearly, buying from the trade will be more expensive but, if you go to a specialist Jaguar dealer – and there are many good independents out there – remember that the premium you pay will also buy you relative peace of mind via a good warranty and a point of call to someone that knows what they are doing should something go wrong.

Of course, which model you eventually buy will largely be down to how much money you have to spend, but within the scale of prices, there are a few watershed points. For example, late 4.0-litre XKR's are almost on a par with early naturally-aspirated 4.2-litre cars but, given that there's a lot less that goes wrong with the 4.2-S, we'd forgo the extra performance and plump for the larger engined car. Spec-wise too, there are a few things to consider.

For starters, while it's normally a case of the more the merrier in terms of options, we'd actively avoid buying cars equipped with sat-nav. Why? Well the system is now out-of-date, and updated DVDs are not currently available. Far better to go for a car with the attractive trio of gauges that were lost on sat-nav equipped cars, and plump for an aftermarket (and updatable) mobile sat-nav system instead. And if you're looking at a car equipped with those very attractive looking and effective Brembo brakes – check the condition of pads and discs very carefully. Remember, they will cost a lot more to maintain than a standard set-up.

To indulge, or not?

If you're already an XK8 or XKR owner then you'll be well versed in how much pleasure these cars can deliver on the road and, having read the above, hopefully you'll be more aware of how to keep your car performing well too. But what if you're considering getting behind the wheel? Quite simply, is buying an XK8 a good idea?



Technical specifications*

| | 4.0-litre XK8 | 4.0-litre XKR | 4.2-litre XK8 | 4.2-litre XKR |
|--------------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| Engine type: | Quad-cam V8 | Quad-cam V8 | Quad-cam V8 | Quad-cam V8 |
| Capacity (cc): | 3,996 | 3,996 | 4,196 | 4,196 |
| Transmission: | 5-speed auto | 5-speed auto | 6-speed auto | 6-speed auto |
| Max power (bhp@rpm): | 290@6,100 | 370@6,150 | 300@6,000 | 400@6,100 |
| Max torque (lb ft@rpm): | 290@4,250 | 387@3,600 | 310@4,100 | 408@3,500 |
| Top speed (mph): | 155 | 155 | 155 | 155 |
| 0-60mph (secs): | 6.4 (6.7) | 5.2 (5.3) | 6.1 (6.3) | 5.2 (5.3) |
| Combined mpg: | 23.8 | 23.1 | 24.9 | 22.9 |
| Insurance group: | 18 (19) | 20 | 19 (20) | 20 |

**Manufacturer's figures for coupe models, figures for comparable convertible models in brackets where different.*



Independent service prices*

| Interval | 4.0-litre XK8 | 4.0-litre XKR | 4.2-litre XK8 | 4.2-litre XKR |
|----------------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| 10,000 / one year | £185 | £185 | £185 | £199 |
| 20,000 / two years | £185 | £185 | £185 | £225 |
| 30,000 / three years | £308 | £308 | £210 | £199 |
| 40,000 / six years | £376 | £376 | £270 | £295 |

*These prices provided by Elite and Performance Jags

The short answer is yes, but do be careful. If you can afford it, there's no question that buying a 4.2-litre example will neatly circumnavigate many of the reliability issues that can potentially afflict an early 4.0-litre car. But find a well-maintained early example, and it will deliver almost as much driving pleasure at a fraction of the purchase cost. In either case, don't skimp on servicing, make use of the excellent network of Jaguar specialists out

there, and you'll still be enjoying your XK8/R long after it's considered a full-blown classic.

Thanks to Elite and Performance Jags, Derby (tel: 01332 265826 / www.eapj.com), for help sourcing the XKR 4.2-S in the pictures, and for technical advice and service item pricing. Thanks also to Barry and Andrew Richardson for the loan of their cars. All prices quoted are from EAPJ and include VAT and fitting unless stated otherwise.

Further reading

| | |
|-----------------------------------|----------------|
| XK8/R Feature | JWM issue |
| Owner's guide | February 2005* |
| Buyer's guide | April 2006* |
| V8 engine issues part 1 | April 2006* |
| V8 engine issues part 2 | May 2006 |
| Repairing floorpans | June 2007 |
| Modifying guide | December 2007 |
| Service guide | March 2008 |
| AJ-V8 maintenance | May 2008 |
| Replacing front suspension bushes | May 2008 |

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