



JAGUAR F-PACE

Jaguar's first SUV was worth the wait, as Tim Barnes-Clay finds out at its launch in Montenegro

The all-new F-Pace is revolutionary. It is Jaguar's first ever sport utility vehicle (SUV), and the model is crucial for the big cat marque to remain competitive in a motoring market swamped with premium SUVs.

The F-Pace is somewhat behind in joining the SUV shindig when you consider it is taking on more established competitors, such as the Porsche Macan and Mercedes-Benz GLC. However, unlike the machines produced by sibling firm, Land Rover, it has been made with more of an athletic road-driving predisposition. And that puts a question mark over some of these rivals' abilities from the off.

None of the F-Pace's key adversaries can equal the Jaguar when it comes to the interior. It has been produced to make you and the car feel in total harmony. The Jaguar has a high driving position and enough room for four-up to sit in real comfort. There is a range of storage areas, including large bottle holding door pockets and a big centrally-placed cubbyhole.

We found getting into the F-Pace's back seats a tad awkward because of the mammoth rear wheel arches, but there is more than enough head and legroom for four tall occupants to take a seat contentedly. Heads only start to skim the roof with the panoramic sunroof fitted. Jaguar offers the option of reclining rear seats as well, adding additional repose for passengers.

As a four-seater, the Jaguar F-Pace is both a spacious passenger transporter and a voluminous cargo-carrier, with 650 litres of luggage space underneath the load cover. The F-Pace's factory-fitted powered tailgate makes access easy, and its rear seats fold virtually flat, expanding the load space to 1,740 litres. There is a 40:20:40 split, which means longer items of up to 1.8 metres can be packed into the Jaguar.

Materials are of top quality all around the dash, while the instrumentation is clear and all the switchgear falls easily to hand. We were particularly mesmerised with the technology on offer. Jaguar's touchscreen infotainment system has been enhanced for the F-Pace and the sat-nav screen is a large leap forward when it comes to responsiveness. Honestly, the pinch-to-zoom function reacts as rapidly as an iPad's. Wi-Fi is also available in the car, along with a wide range of apps to help easily access the F-Pace's systems.

Directly below the dashboard, the F-Pace's central cubbyhole is big and is home to a USB slot and 12-volt power point. An HDMI connection is available on the options list, too. With an HDMI

connection the infotainment screen can 'mirror' images from most smartphones. Furthermore, it allows a Blu-ray DVD player to be connected in the car. Another smart piece of gadgetry is Jaguar's Activity Key – a water-resistant car key that can be worn on the wrist.

We drove the £37,860 automatic 2-litre diesel at its launch in Montenegro – the model most likely to be seen on the UK's roads. The eight-speed automatic transmission impressed us with its near-seamless changes up and down the cogs. In fact, the tiny country's winding mountain roads showed how capable the gearing is. The F-Pace never once grappled with which ratio to choose – an issue some challengers have had with their gearboxes. The Adriatic coastal roads we drove, with up to 25 hairpins on one downhill section, punished the F-Pace, but not once did it complain.

The car has a rear-wheel drive character most of the time, only delivering torque to the front wheels when the Jaguar feels it is needed. This means the SUV bonds to the road like superglue and the steering is sharp and well-weighted enough to encourage confident cornering. Indeed, the F-Pace always feels planted and unruffled whatever situation it is in. This includes off-tarmac situations, as we found out taking the latest Jaguar model up and down an ancient Prussian trail, littered with rocks. It should come as no surprise that the SUV is this talented off-road, though. After all, it is built by the same business that puts together the Land Rover and Range Rover models – and they lead the 4x4 pack.

The combined fuel economy for the F-Pace 2.0d Prestige AWD Auto we drove is claimed at 53mpg, while the official CO2 figure is 139g/km. Our test drives were long, but generally twisty. Averaging 40mph on some of the most spectacularly scenic, rally-like roads and tracks in southeast Europe, we averaged 45mpg. On what passes for a motorway in Montenegro, averaging 60mph, we achieved 52mpg.

This variant's four-cylinder power unit produces 177bhp and torque of 430Nm. The amount of clout allows for zero to 62mph to be achieved in 8.7 seconds in all-wheel drive automatic configuration. Top speed is 129mph.

It is a shame that Jaguar took so long coming up with its first ever SUV. However, it's finally here, and it has been worth the wait. We liked the look of the F-Pace as well as its good interior headroom and big load area. We also enjoyed the way the Jaguar sucked up everything Montenegro threw at it. It is a comfortable cruiser on the straights, a sports car on the twisty bits and a proper off-roader – should the need ever arise. Basically, this is one unflappable machine that rides brilliantly – and looks the business.

Truly, the introduction of the Jaguar F-Pace into the premium SUV market is an exciting prospect for anyone looking for a prestigious, luxury, all-wheel-drive car that is just a little left-field. The model is refreshingly out-of-the-ordinary for Jaguar and the stylish F-Pace is bound to be a talking-point for some time to come.

