



This issue, Tim Barnes-Clay puts the pedal to the metal on two exciting new cars – the Jaguar XE and Audi’s latest TT Roadster

*The Jaguar XE comes brimming with technology, ultra-efficient engines and sharp-suited aesthetics.*

The smooth body hides a construction that’s 75 per cent aluminium – a material not only sturdier than the steel used by its rivals, but also lighter.

Handling is first-class, too. That lightweight physique comes into its own here. Even if you pick the Comfort suspension setup (you can also choose from Sport and Adaptive), the XE feels quick to respond.

Inside, there are slabs of wood, leather and brushed aluminium but, almost more importantly, is the introduction of the InControl infotainment system. This brings the XE level with its challengers, like BMW, Audi, Mercedes-Benz and Lexus, straight from the off. You can even fine-tune the climate control, play around with the door locks and start the engine with your smartphone!

A sporty drive is key to any Jaguar and that energetic feel starts from the driver’s seat. Like most models that came before it, the XE cossets you, thanks to a raised transmission tunnel and high window line. Another keystone of the Jaguar experience,

a sense of sumptuousness, comes in the form of costly materials covering most of the cabin – leather upholstery is in all but the rudimentary model.

To call the XE spacious is stretching the truth, but it’s comparable with the room you would find in its BMW 3 Series opponent. In the real world, that means there’s



plenty of capacity for adults up front, but not so much in the rear. There, legroom equals what you get in the German foe, but the low roofline and seemingly tighter interior impacts on upper body comfort.

The Jaguar also offers largely the same interior storage space as you would expect from any of its adversaries. There are pockets in all

doors, a pair of cup-holders in the front and a cubby that doubles up as a front-centre armrest. And with 455-litres of boot space you’ll easily get your golf bags in!

Like most modern motors, the XE comes with a full set of active and passive safety technologies to keep you out of harm’s way. Complementing the standard traction and stability control is the innovative All Surface Progress Control – a system that instinctively moves the car off from a standstill in greasy conditions to thwart wheel spin.

On a long commute, the XE is more comfortable than the BMW 3 Series. Indeed, however you choose to spec your Jaguar, it feels clued-in and up to the challenge. Out on the motorway, the car is hushed. In fact, it’s so quiet, engine noise is almost non-existent in petrol models and barely perceptible in the oil-burners.

You can choose between an eight-speed auto ‘box or a six-speed manual gearbox. But the automatic is the sweetest. The cogs feel perfectly harmonised with the engine’s power band and the programmed changes

are sharp-witted. It also comes with paddles that allow for even hastier manual changes.

Of the petrol engines – all of which get the automatic gearbox – the 197bhp four-cylinder 2.0-litre lump on the R-Sport model is the one I

liked. It feels speedy, as well as being effortless and refined in its operation. It shifts from 0-62mph in 7.7 seconds and tops out at 147mph, returning around 37mpg.

After a few hours in the saddle, it’s abundantly clear that Jaguar has

accomplished an amazing balance between ride comfort and handling prowess. Where the BMW 3 Series sits on the dynamics side of the fence and the Mercedes-Benz C-Class prefers luxury, the XE achieves both. Price: £29,740.

*With a snarl and a bark, the new Audi TT Roadster 2.0 TFSI S line sounded just the way I hoped it would when I set off for my test drive around the twisty roads of rural Northamptonshire recently.*

I was lent the 2.0 TFSI S line Quattro 230 PS with a slick six-speed manual gearbox, cloaked in white with a contrasting black hood, and finished off with black Alcantara and leather sport seats – I could easily have kept this car.

But on my journalist’s wage, there’s no chance of owning a new TT Roadster, because this car costs £34,650 on the road. To make matters worse for me, my press car came loaded with options including: 19” five-twin-spoke design alloy wheels (£450); MMI Navigation Plus (£1,495); Auto-dimming rear-view mirror with light and rain sensor package (£110); Storage and luggage package (£175)... the list goes on. Suffice it to say, the total cost for my test model was £40,315.

Getting the roof down on the 2015 Audi TT Roadster takes just ten seconds. You only need to hold a switch placed near the electronic

handbrake and motor along under 30mph. Once driving, with the wind in your hair, the TT is quiet enough to hold a conversation with your passenger.

What’s really noticeable behind the wheel is the TT’s new virtual cockpit. This is based around a large



LCD display that fills the instrument binnacle and replaces the traditional analogue dials. You can choose between two display modes: in the classic view, the speedometer and rev counter are in the foreground;

in ‘infotainment’ style the virtual instruments are smaller. The space that becomes free as a result provides plentiful room for other functions, such as the very clear navigation map.

The engine is muscular, even from low revs, and pushes out power in an excitingly linear manner. A zero to 62mph time of 6.2sec and a 155mph top end equals an utterly invigorating drive.

Ride comfort is bang on for a sports car, and the steering, which uses electric power assistance, is precise and satisfyingly weighted. Reassuringly, the brakes scrub off momentum in an instant too.

So, if you fancy a handsome premium brand sports car that delivers easy, top down motoring fun – and can tear up the tarmac with just a blip of the throttle – then the new Audi TT Roadster is for you.

Price: £34,650

*Tim Barnes-Clay*

