

# CLASS ACT POUNCES BACK

*Driving the new Jaguar F-Type in Portugal*

Seven years into the lifecycle of Jaguar's class act F-Type sports car, the enigmatic two-seater is now even more refined both inside and out. *Signatures* sampled the car during a rain-soaked event in Portugal.







By the late-1950s, Jaguar closed the book on its early racing heritage after successfully competing in a string of 24 Hours of Le Mans races with the company's D-Type racing chassis.

With the fruits of their development programme still in hand, the then-defunct Jaguar department was given the brief to use D-Type style construction to build a road-going sports car to replace the XK150.

The original prototype (E1A) was introduced in 1957 that featured a monocoque design, Jaguar's fully independent rear suspension and the well-proven "XK" engine. The car was used solely for factory testing and was eventually scrapped. Jaguar's second E-Type concept (E2A) - constructed from a steel chassis with an aluminium body - ultimately became the basic foundation for the Series I production car to be introduced between March and July of 1961.

The E-Type was an overnight success and has become one of the most iconic Jaguars ever created. With its long,

swooping bonnet it was also one of the most beautiful, prompting praise from Enzo Ferrari who declared it to be the most beautiful car ever made.

#### SECOND OF A NEW ERA

Following in the footsteps of its elegant progenitor, the 2013 Jaguar F-Type exploded onto the automotive scene with much of the same charisma of the E-Type. Given the constraints of modern safety regulations, however, the overall design could never be quite as progressive as the E-Type was in the 1960s.

Still, it donned beautifully, the signature Jaguar double haunch lines that have defined that brand's sports cars as far back as the Jaguar XK120 from the late 1940s.

During our international launch drive in Portugal, Jaguar's director of design, Julian Thompson, talked us through the styling changes now introduced to the updated F-Type.

By far the most noticeable feature of the new design is the slimmed-down horizontal full-LED headlights that have replaced the vertical units of the original F-Type.

Of course, one might expect purists to take a dim view of the new light, but they are the stylistic highlight of the new car for me. Besides, says Jaguar, the technology required to make these lights was not available when the first-generation F-Type arrived.

Enhanced by a larger grille, new front bumper design, and a restyled clamshell bonnet, the car appears much more masculine front-on. At the same time, the bonnet also seems to be significantly longer when viewed from the side - a more deliberate echoing of the E-Type's



*The mighty 5.0-litre 575 horsepower all-wheel-drive R version ... is the pick of the bunch for those who expect all-out madness when they stomp the loud pedal.*



fantastically elongated nose.

Daytime running lights have retained the signature J shape that defines modern Jaguars, as the rear lights, now designed with an LED chicane signature that reminds of the I-Pace electric SUV, précis the enhancements at the back of the F-Type.

### MINOR CHANGES INSIDE

A mix of subtle enhancements and new-generation technology define the changes to the refreshed F-Type cabin.

Front and centre to the driver experience, a new digital instrument panel replaces the analogue instruments of yesteryear, with a 12.3" high-definition, virtual instrument cluster with personalisation options galore. Multiple display themes allow the driver to set the mood from a classic analogue-style to a full navigation map, and to emphasise the car's sporting nature; a large central rev counter and speedometer as the default.

Compatible with either Apple CarPlay or Android Auto, the updated infotainment system retains the current touchscreen size, although the now higher-resolution screen is significantly crisper than before. This is especially handy when reverse parking, as the coupé still suffers from a case of limited rear visibility.

Of interest to music junkies, the new Jaguar infotainment system has Spotify embedded into the system, and has the ability to do software updates over-the-air.

With all its sumptuous Windsor leather goodness and satin-finish chrome, the F-Type retains its uber-classy cabin feel. Monogram stitching, Jaguar motifs in the headrests and doorsills, and discreet Jaguar crest markings offer further, subtle, reminders of the heritage of this car.

### DYNAMIC REAWAKENING

Jaguar South Africa hasn't fiddled much with the F-Type range line-up, which is expected to arrive by the middle of

the year. As before, three engine options will be offered here, in either coupé (my preferred iteration) or convertible guise.

Enter the field at around the R1.2-million mark with the rear-wheel-driven P300 ('P' referring to the car's horsepower or "Pferdestärke" rating) that is powered by a 2.0-litre four-cylinder turbo unit that generates outputs of 221 kW and 400 Nm.

Dropped from several other markets – but still accessible to South African buyers – the 280 kW, 3.0-litre V6 supercharged P380 is next in line. With your choice of either rear-wheel-, or all-wheel-drive, although the 460 Nm bombshell was not available to sample during the launch event between Porto and Lisbon.

At the crescendo, the 5.0-litre supercharged V8 P575 is a machine to be reckoned with. Chuck 423 kW and 700 Nm of torque in the nose of almost any car and the result is bound to be spectacular. In the AWD F-Type R, it translates to a zero to 100-km/h sprint in a claimed 3.7 seconds, and a rated top speed of 300 km/h!

Curiously, my favourite of the two versions tested at launch was the least powerful of the F-Type triumvirate – the P300 First Edition Coupé. Under its hood, the feisty 2.0-litre Ingenium offers the best mix of performance, lightness, and value for money. Spec it right, and you can nearly bag two P300s for the R2,306,200 base price of the R.

The P300 feels light on its feet and truly well balanced – no doubt that this has much to do with the 120 kg weight difference compared to its bodybuilder brethren. The 60% power drop from the big bruiser V8's lofty heights will certainly not thrill the hard barking enthusiast. Still, for its nimbleness in the curves and ability to record a respectable 5.7-second sprint time from standstill to 100 km/h, the P300 is a seriously sporty option for the everyday driver. As a bonus, it has





*Of interest to music junkies, the new Jaguar infotainment system has Spotify embedded into the system, and has the ability to do software updates over-the-air.*



a surprisingly meaty (for a four-potter) exhaust note that, despite being enhanced through the speakers, causes enough of a stir to trick you into thinking you're piloting something with way more grunt.

The active exhaust system is available on all cars and includes - in the V8 - a 'Quiet Start' function.

The mighty 5.0-litre 575 horsepower all-wheel-drive R version - driven in a bold 'Sorento Yellow' coupé form, is the pick of the bunch for those who expect all-out madness when they stomp the loud pedal.

Although there is nothing tame about this bad boy, Jaguar has achieved what is likely their greatest upgrade feat with the F-Type's new active rear differential. Combined with next-generation all-wheel grip, fast-thinking stability control, and purpose-designed Pirelli P Zero tyres, this cat can almost not put a foot wrong. It never during our two-day test drive, despite the rain-soaked conditions.

When wielding 700 Nm on tight, wet, and winding back roads can get a little interesting if the car's dynamic components don't play well together. The current F-Type was often criticised for being too light in terms of steering feedback. Although I would personally not make that charge under everyday driving circumstances, there has been a complete recalibration



of the electronically-assisted power steering; giving a more taut, responsive driving experience. The R is made to be manhandled, and the new steering set-up does feel expertly weighted.

New springs and anti-roll bars front and rear, and an uprated chassis, gives a more roots-returning solid sports experience, while the eight-speed ZF transmission has also benefitted from Jaguar's fearsome XE SV Project 8 - the most powerful road-legal Jaguar in history. You can feel its DNA here, coursing through the veins of the new

F-Type, albeit in a more refined way.

Given Jaguar's history of creating thrilling driving machines, there wasn't too much that could have gone wrong with the refreshed F-Type. Yes, it is a considerable evolution rather than a brand new car, but it is a relief that one of Britain's greatest sports cars is still a top tier choice for the driving enthusiast. There may be sharper options out there, but this F-Type is every bit as exciting, and then 🐾