

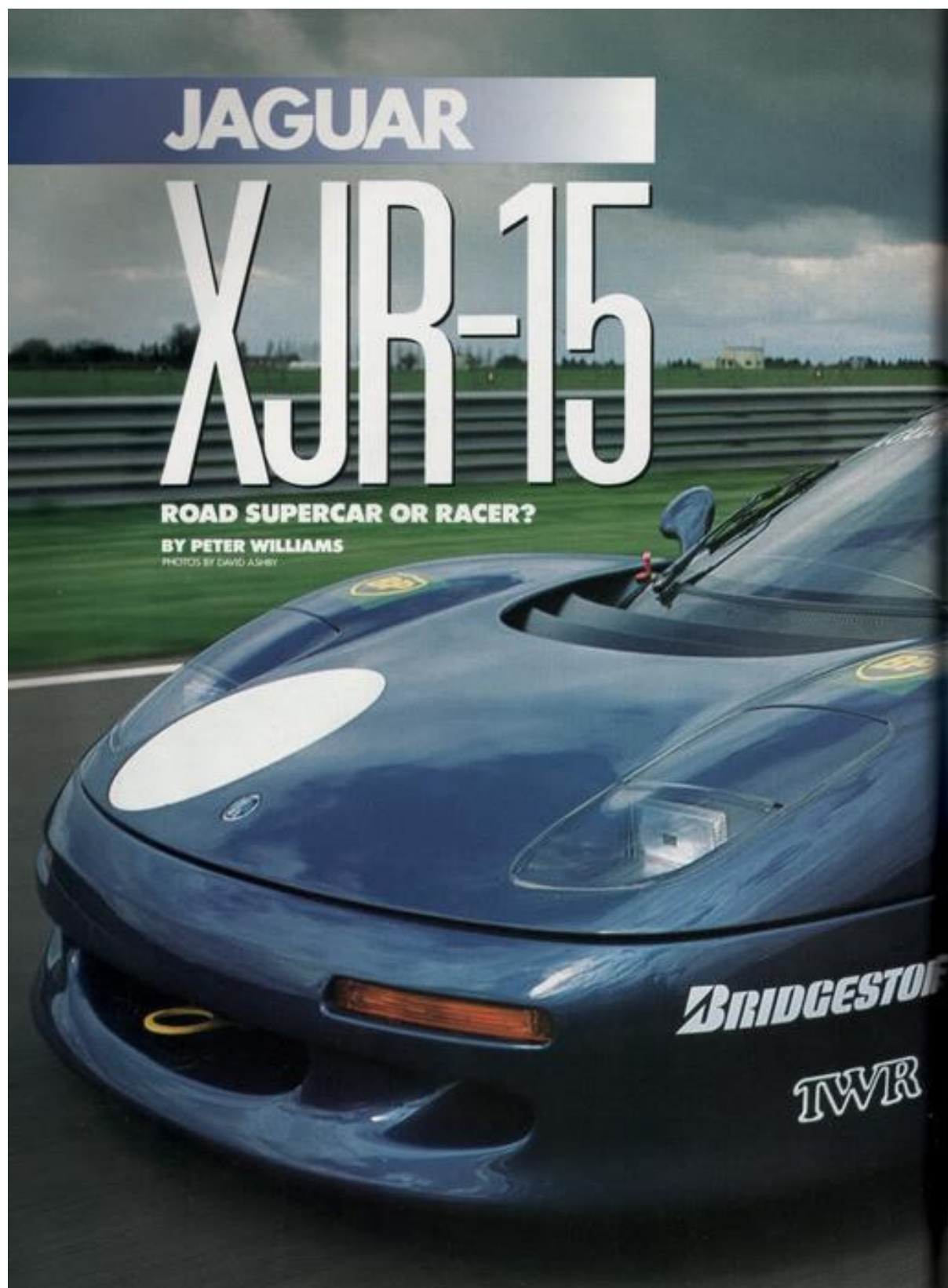
JAGUAR

XJR-15

ROAD SUPERCAR OR RACER?

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PHOTOS BY DAVID ASHBY



Derek Warwick gave the thumbs-up sign and this, our final lap, was going to be a flyer. We were at England's premier Grand Prix circuit, Silverstone, representing the United States with a party of overseas journalists from Continental Europe and Japan. The occasion was an auspicious one, in that we were each to ride shotgun with JaguarSport/ Tom Walkinshaw Racing drivers Warwick or Scotsman David Leslie. I chose Warwick because with 130 Grand Prix starts (though no wins) under his belt, I felt that he'd be the better

bet. I was not to be disappointed.

Silverstone has changed a lot since last season. It is longer and boasts more bends—it is now much more of a driver's circuit, the racers told us on the day of our visit. Silverstone has always been a fast track. In the Grand Prix calendar it's the first of a series of high-speed, mid-season races, followed by the Austrian and German events. For the new Silverstone, the owners did as much as they could to make it more challenging—and slower—without destroying too much of the feel of the original. Certainly all the drivers on the XJR-15 test day





competition license, you're not going to get to drive this beast.

Here I was being strapped into the competition harness that was fitted to this car for the day. As this is strictly a single-seat sports car, that meant sitting on the floor, actually, with some foam to cushion my posterior. My Group C chauffeur said we had better talk after the ride—the car is too noisy. I thought that I'd have enough trouble just concentrating on what Warwick and the car were doing, as he took me around the circuit.

We had the circuit to ourselves. Out of pit lane we didn't get a true bite at the first bend at the end of the start/finish straight, Copse. It's tighter than it used to be. Drivers have to turn in sooner, but with modern downforce and aerodynamics, it's now a faster corner than it used to be, because what's left of the old bend on the outside provides a greater run-on area.

The revs were climbing, and Warwick hit 6th gear for a short respite before the anchors came on for the new Maggots Curve, which developed into a full right-hander—the first in a series of three bends. He sacrificed that first right-hand bend to get the new Becketts (now a left-hander) on line and accelerated out in 4th gear through the new right-hand Chapel Curve.

Here, I realized I was in a race rather than a road car. The XJR-15's accelerative prowess was kick-in-the-back stuff, and the car twitched as Warwick climbed out of Chapel in 5th and into 6th down Hangar Straight—the fastest part of the circuit. In the few seconds I had to take it all in, I completely forgot to check the speedo reading (yes, this is an unusual fitting to a race car, and we'll see why later).

But I did note the dancing of the rev counter. As Stowe Corner approached rapidly, Warwick braked heavily, shifted into 5th, and went around a long, tight right-hander and then dropped down into a new straight bit called



liked the new Silverstone, describing it as a driver's circuit. Warwick had been pounding around the new Silverstone since 10:45 that morning and, apart from a break for lunch, hadn't stopped. By 3:15 p.m., it was my turn.

It's with great but reserved anticipation that one approaches a car like the XJR-15—even for *just* a ride. For a non-racing driver, getting in some serious driving at the wheel of this car wouldn't be easy. Coping with the 6-speed straight-cut gearbox is not easy if you've never used one before. And then there's all that power from the 6.0-liter Jaguar V-12, 450 bhp at 6250 rpm. Unless you have an international



■ British motoring press treats the XJR-15 like the superstar it is. Driver Derek Warwick flogged the Jag around an improved Silverstone.



Vale. Heading for Stowe in 4th gear, Warwick made an all-to-brief change to 5th before the XJR-15 was braking hard again to enter the new Club Corner. This corner began with a tight 3rd gear left, up into 4th out of the first right that followed, and 5th for what was essentially the old right-hander, Club. Such are the Jaguar V-12 engine's abilities, that I never saw the revs drop below 3000, despite being flung around the cabin somewhat.

Into 6th gear out of the Club Curve and flat out through the Abbey Curve, we blasted forth toward another new right-hander called Bridge, which lurks immediately after the new Dunlop bridge. This bend, with the new Copse, says Warwick, has turned out to be faster than the new circuit's designers had planned. If you're skilled and brave enough, you can take Bridge in 6th rather than 5th. But the driver has to get the car back over to the right-hand side quickly to take one of the most difficult parts of the circuit, a new twisty section consisting of a series of four bends, before reaching the once-again flat-out Woodcote and going on down the start/finish line straight again.

The first bend of the new twisty section is Priory, taken in 3rd. Here, Warwick snatched the gears down, but the XJR-15 clung on leech-like, and so did I. Shortly thereafter, we were into Brooklands—another tight left-hander—before the first of the two rights that make up Luf-

field. I saw each of these series of bends rapidly approaching, as Warwick kept on the power to come out of Luffield in 4th, the V-12's note rising smoothly once again as the XJR-15 powered on down through Woodcote and along the straight toward Copse.

This was a case of getting up through the gears as rapidly as the 7000-rpm rev limit would allow (there's no visible redline as such) and then a touch of braking and drop to 5th to take Copse properly. Then Warwick gave me the thumbs-up; we were heading for the flyer.

Maggotts, Becketts and Chapel came much more quickly this time. We then shot down Hangar Straight, where the XJR-15 is said to hit 170 mph, while after Stowe and Vale comes the first left that makes up Club; here, the XJR-15's tail momentarily flicked out of line.

Nothing dramatic, mind you. Warwick was always in full control, and seconds later we





Indeed, the XJR-15 has a Jekyll and Hyde character about it.

were about to enter Bridge again: A touch of the brakes, 5th, and we were going through. That new tight series of bends before Woodcote came and went, and for the second time I began to ache for a proper seat.

Within a couple minutes, we were back in the pits and, before I disassembled the full harness, Warwick told me what the XJR-15 is like to drive. I could see that it hadn't been ideally set up for the track, but then as many rumors have suggested the XJR-15 was never intended to be purely a track car (more on that later).

"It's a bit too soft. You can tell by the way the car was moving around on the circuit," says Warwick. "It needs stiffer springs to cure it for track work and, of course, we've been out on rain tires rather than slicks." In a few moments, Warwick has perfectly summed up the XJR-15. But there's a lot more to this car than the sortie we'd just had on this day.

Initially, the idea was to produce little more than a road-going Group C car, but with that brief, more room and higher levels of visibility

would be needed—with genuine space for two and proper seating inside the cabin. The doors had to be changed to give proper sealing, and the clip-on racing windscreen was dumped for a fixed one. By the time all this had been done, and because proper shoulder room was required, it was clear that a clean-sheet-of-paper design was essential.

It was some way into the project that designer Peter Stevens (highly regarded for his work at Lotus on the Esprit and Elan) persuaded TWR/JaguarSport boss Tom Walkinshaw that the restyle was the way to go. At this stage, it was also clear that the car was a Tom Walkinshaw Racing (TWR) project rather than a Jaguar one.

Work on XJR-15 began in early 1988, when the project was intended to be a test-bed for the use of advanced composites on road cars. But once Jaguar's own XJ220 appeared at the 1988 British motor show, work was shelved on the TWR car, to allow full-time development of the Brown's Lane factory's own supercar.

With the on-again-off-again nature of the XJ220 throughout the GM-Ford tussle for the British luxury-car maker, the car that became the XJR-15 made progress. Serious develop-



ment started in the fall of 1989, before the XJ220 was given the official Ford go-ahead in early 1990, and continued right through to just before the R9R's launch as the XJR-15 at Silverstone on November 15, 1990.

During this key gestation period, the two cars adopted parentage from different generations of Group C racing cars—the XJ220 losing the V-12 in favor of a detuned version of the twin-turbo 3.5-liter V-6 used in the XJR-9's Group C successors until the arrival of the Ford V-8-based unit in the current XJR-14 racer. And, as logic would have it, although the world saw the XJ220 first, the R9R/XJR-15 was launched as a turnkey car, ahead of its road-going sister.

For all their separate development, the cars share a family likeness. It's more to do with those typical Jaguar swooping curves and minor detailing in the air vents and panel fits, rather than a conscious effort to show a family link.

But what the XJR-15 does have is a more lithe look—probably to do with the fact that it's based on a racer. It's low, mean and light—compared to a true GT supercar. Sitting on the standard and lengthy XJR-9 107.0-in. wheelbase, it measures 188.9 in. long and 74.8 in. wide.

Height is 43.3 in., and the curb weight 2310 lb., about 440 lb heavier than the Group C car on which it's based.

Much of the added weight has gone into the road-going design aspects already mentioned. Pay close attention, and you'll find air grilles for flow-through ventilation, interior door catches and full instrumentation (including speedometer) inside the cabin; pop-up headlamps, front turn signals and side markers on the exterior. The XJR-15 rides taller than an XJR-9 race car, and doesn't have its high down-force aerodynamics either. There is, however, a

■ XJR-15 interior is not upholstered—those stripes are carbon-fiber matting, used also as a design element. Engine compartment contains 6.0-liter V-12, based on mid-Sixties' street engine. New version produces 450 bhp.





The XJR-15 is the serious car you would expect it to be.

big rear wing—soft in appearance, again to meet the road-going criteria.

Indeed the XJR-15 has a Jekyll and Hyde character about it. Underneath that Group C-inspired road-going bodywork is a race chassis and mechanically the car follows race design. The engine is a stressed member of the chassis carrying the double wishbone unequal-length rear suspension complete with aluminum uprights. The tube shocks are housed within the wheels to allow the maximum possible venturi-effect aerodynamics.

For the front suspension, classic Group C practice is followed with the wishbones actuating the spring and tube shock units that lie horizontally across the car's nose. It also features an AP Racing 3-plate carbon clutch, vented racing discs and 4-piston calipers.

The XJR-15 is the serious car you would expect it to be. And, in keeping with its abilities, Jaguar and TWR obviously settled whatever internal differences they had over it clashing with the XJ220 and came up with a \$1 million prize fund race series—the JaguarSport International Challenge.

To be held at three of the European Grand Prix meetings this season, the Monaco, British and Belgian, it is only open to those who purchase the \$960,165 supercar. Even then, it's not necessarily the owner who races—unless he holds the relevant international competition li-

cense! Eight of the drivers are, however, nominated by TWR.

A maximum of 30 cars can compete in the International Challenge, and no more than 50 will be built. At the time of this writing, the series was planned only for 1991, but even if it continues next year there will be a surplus of cars. What the owners do with them is not up to JaguarSport or TWR.

The XJR-15 is everything a track car should be and more—it could yet end up leading the road-going supercar pack. ■

Jaguar XJR-15

SPECIFICATIONS

Price	\$960,165
Curb weight	2310 lb
Wheelbase	107.0 in.
Track, fr	variable, depends on tires
Length	188.9 in.
Width	74.8 in.
Height	43.3 in.
Fuel capacity	31.7 U.S. gal.

ENGINE & DRIVETRAIN

Engine	sohc V-12
Bore x stroke	90.0 x 78.4 mm
Displacement	5983 cc
Compression ratio	11.0:1
Horsepower, DIN net	450 bhp @ 6250 rpm
Torque	420 lb-ft @ 4500 rpm
Fuel injection	Zytek sequential electronic
Transmission	5-sp manual
Final-drive ratio	variable

CHASSIS & BODY

Layout	mid-engine/rear drive
Brake system, fr	14.0-in. drilled & vented disc
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Wheels	O.Z. alloy split rim, 17 x 9 1/2 f, 17 x 13 r
Tires	Bridgestone RE 71 or slick race type
Steering type	rack & pinion
Suspension, fr: wishbones actuating pushrods to coil spring-tube shocks mounted longitudinally in center of car/alloy uprights, coil springs, tube shocks	

PERFORMANCE¹

0-60 mph	na
Standing 1/4 mile	na
Top speed	est 185 mph, depending on gearing

na means information is not available.

¹Manufacturer's claims.