

KERBCRAWLER

BMW M5
JAGUAR XJR

The growl and the pussy cat

Two approaches to the super-saloon, the smoothie Jaguar XJR and BMW's Nürburgring-for-breakfast M5



PHOTOGRAPH BY DAVID HAYES

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MPVS, VEHICLES WITH MORE THAN JUST ONE PURPOSE, what a clever idea. Not only getting from A to B with utmost efficiency, but also packing in family members, friends and colleagues. There may even be room for some of their luggage. How wonderful. But MPVs don't have to be vans with windows. Oh no, they can be four-door supercars; and why not? Shrink a continent in an afternoon, with five-up in a vehicle that doesn't attract too much of the wrong sort of attention. Practical, fast, subtle yet stylish. Now that really is multi-purpose, and how I see the appeal of both the BMW M5 and the Jaguar XJR.

Are we comparing like with like here? Featured is an E34 BMW M5 and X300 XJR whose production runs only just overlapped for a year between September '94 and

'95. There is an argument that the old Jaguar Sport XJR 4.0 (1989-94), as fettled by TWR, ought to line up against the Bimmer, but that would be unfair. Even up against the old, equally rectangular E28 M5 from the mid-'80s, the pre-Ford Jag would be a lumbering, shoddily built shower of a super saloon. In sheer ability, driver appeal and horsepower it has to be the later XJR. After all, they're both six-pots and it is equally significant that they are now, in their latest incarnations, V8s. No, what we have here is two of a kind. These are supercar saloons, which could not be more stimulating, distinctive, or different.

The BMW M5 came first. Indeed, at BMW it was the first true M saloon to make it to the showroom, as the M-division took the M1's engine and stuck it in the

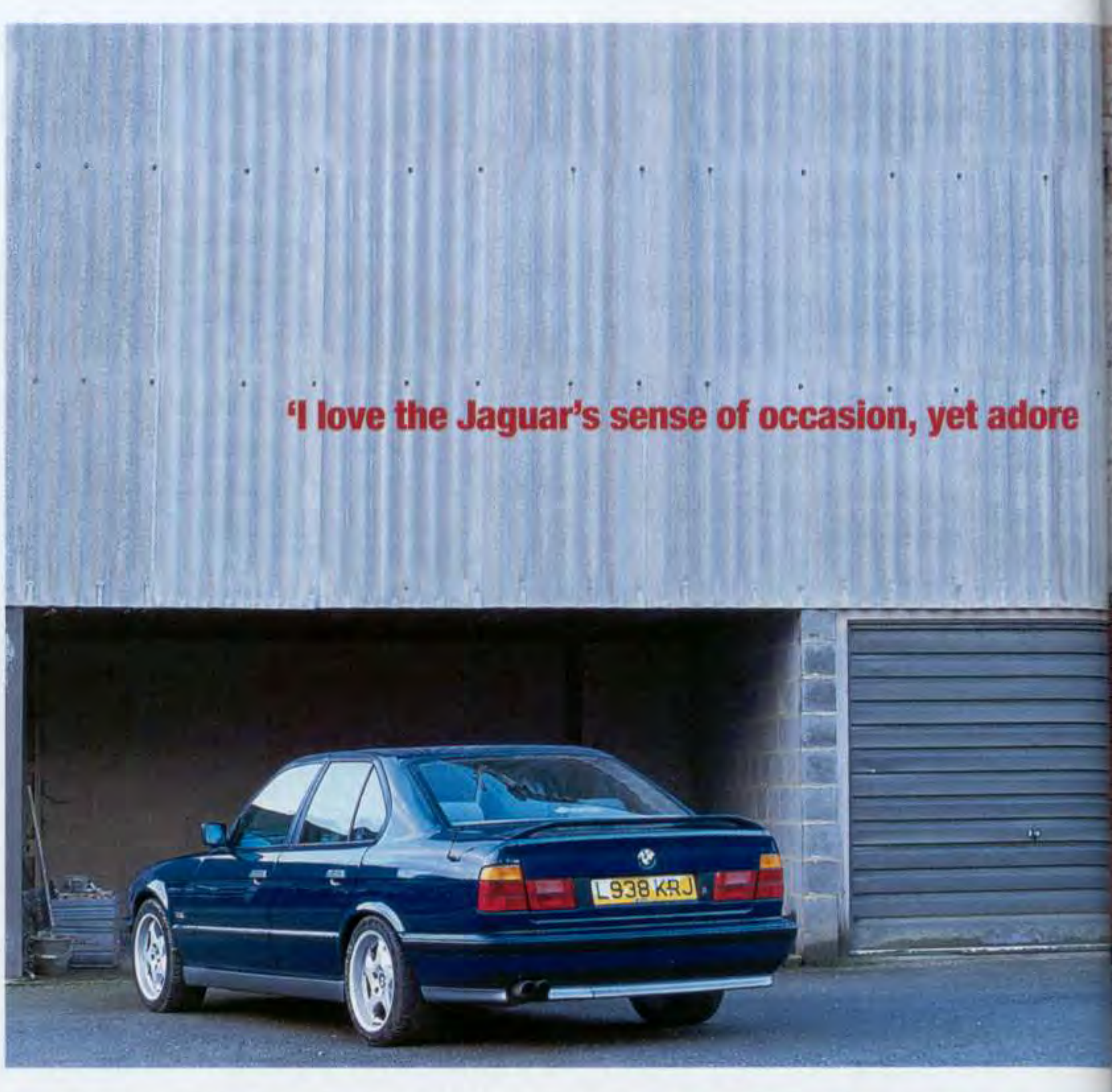
Many thanks to Munich Legends (01825 740456) and Edgbaston Specialist Cars (0121 622 5353)

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1994 BMW M5 3.8
Price now: £17,500
Price then: £51,450
Engine: 3795cc 24V straight six, 340bhp, 289lb ft
Performance: 0-60mph 5.9 sec, 155mph
Tax: £155 **Insurance:** 20
Depreciation: £33,950



'I love the Jaguar's sense of occasion, yet adore

5-series. Q-car looks and sensational performance combined with that tail-happy chassis. What fun. So, when the E34 version arrived in 1988 (we didn't get UK right-hand-drive imports until February 1990), it had a lot to live up to. They stuck with the well-proven 24-valve unit that had been stroked to 3535cc. Internally, it was reworked with revised camshafts, crankshaft and flywheel. It produced 315bhp (29bhp more than the M635), and lots of torque, some 266lb ft of it. Sixty arrived in six seconds and top speed was a limited 155mph. BMW had every right to proclaim it, 'the most powerful production saloon in the world.' The 5551 underpinnings were suitably beefed up, and lusciously 20mm to cope. A self-levelling rear axle helped, thicker anti-roll bars, stiffer springs and twin-tube gas dampers were all part of the package and 'elasto-kinematics' (in Bavaria-speak) dialled out oversteer and introduced welcome understeer. And the M5 went on getting better.

February 1992 saw an even bigger engine: 3795cc producing 340bhp. The 0-60mph time went down well below six seconds and there was a trick suspension system called Adaptive M Technic (the Nürburgring option), which constantly adjusted the dampers to the conditions. The clutch was a bit lighter and the gear change slicker and those full-width, Halfords-style alloys were replaced by equally efficient but more macho jobs.

By September '92 there was an engine immobiliser, six speakers, revised door mirrors, side-impact protection and seat-belt tensioners. From September '94, a driver's airbag was added. May '94 saw the last round of changes with a wider grille, 18in alloys and an optional six-speed gearbox.

Jaguar found itself up against this formidable package in 1994, but luckily they had the X300's spanking new shape to fall back on. Did I say new? Really, it's a Series 3 XJ, which has been colour-keyed and posted through a gap in the space/time continuum or something. It's the XJ40 should have gone on looking, instead of that disturbing cubist period it endured for eight years. Never mind that, because the muscular, low lying and quintessentially Lyons-like body was all the better for containing a supercharged six-cylinder engine. Displacing 3980cc, the straight-six 24-valve intercooled unit was force-fed by a belt-driven Roots-type supercharger. It produced 321bhp but tellingly delivered 378lb ft of torque.

Taming it all was a limited-slip differential, a traction-control system and beefed-up suspension. At the time, if you didn't fancy the Jag badge and four doors you could always spend £33k more for an Aston Martin DB7, which had a marginally faster 0-60mph time and top speed and did fractionally better in fuel economy terms.

Otherwise, the 0-60 in 5.9 seconds and 155mph top speed, plus realistic room for three more in the back, was a pretty convincing argument. Equipment levels were generous, and that included air-con and 12-way electrically adjustable front seats.

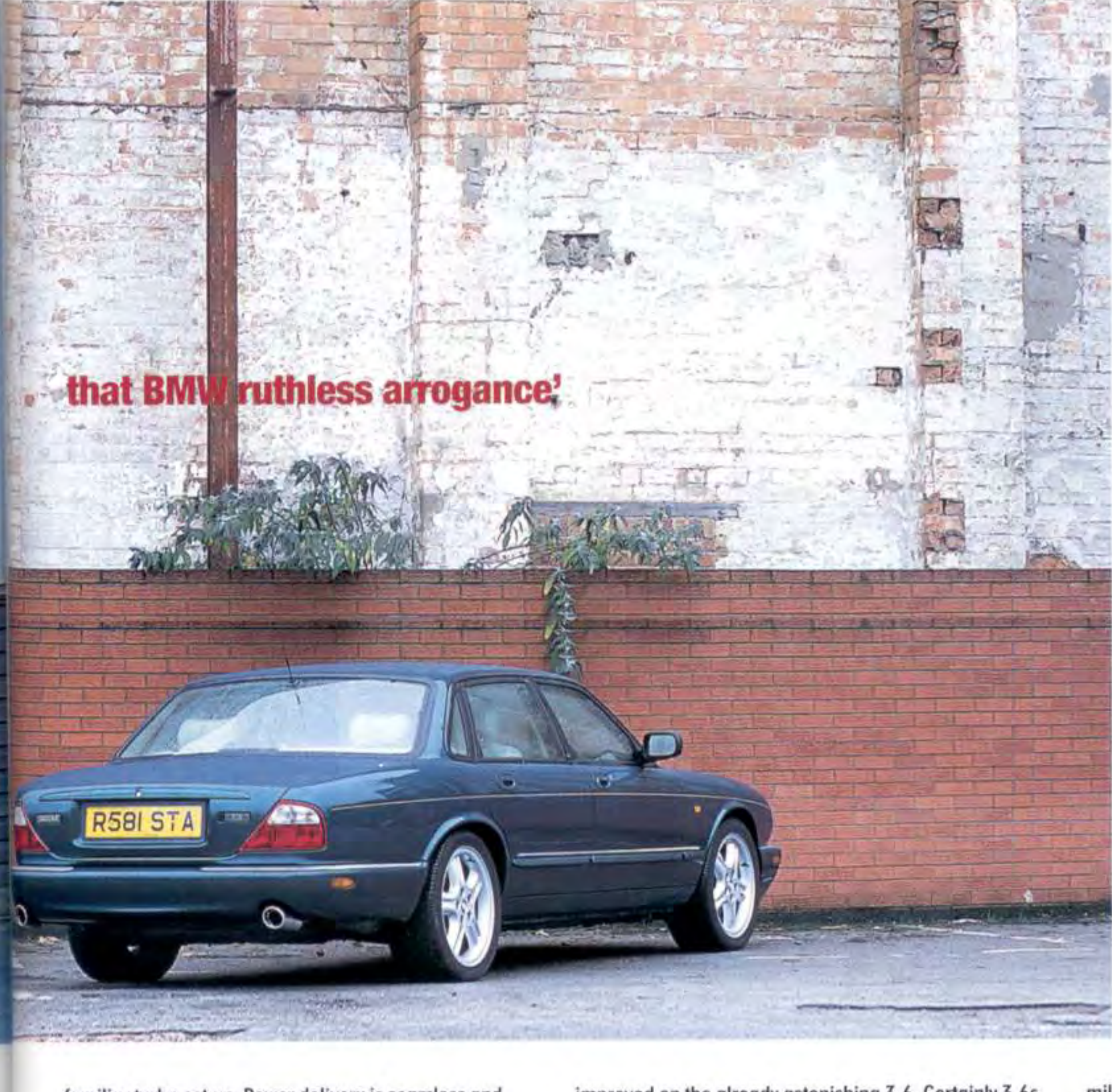
Passengers got a glovebox in mid-'95, while rear-seat passengers in October 1996 enjoyed a new-style rear seat, which included a three-point seatbelt and flatter cushion. The CD autochanger was relocated to the nearside of the boot, and drivers got a wood and leather steering wheel. The 370bhp XJR V8 from September 1997 is another story, and another price bracket. If you want one of those, it will be well over £25,000. But how does £11,995 sound?

The best M5s must have a full fletching history, too. Passengers got a glovebox in mid-'95, while rear-seat passengers in October 1996 enjoyed a new-style rear seat, which included a three-point seatbelt and flatter cushion. The CD autochanger was relocated to the nearside of the boot, and drivers got a wood and leather steering wheel. The 370bhp XJR V8 from September 1997 is another story, and another price bracket. If you want one of those, it will be well over £25,000. But how does £11,995 sound?

Edgbaston Specialist Cars are effectively 'XJRs-R-Us' in the UK, and sold 42 of them last year. Six-cylinder model prices start at just under £12k and go to £18,995. That's VFM for you, but then that has always been the use Jaguar marketplace. Proprietor Stephen Hayes agrees, 'The XJR is tremendous value for the money. It offers Ferrari levels of performance, but without the mega maintenance bills. I really enjoy someone discovering on the test drive what a sensational piece of kit the XJR is. They become enthusiasts within minutes.'

It is difficult to disagree; the supercharger certainly does its job without the fuss and bluster of the more

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that BMW ruthless arrogance?



1997 Jaguar XJR
Price now: £18,995
Price then: £50,490
Engine: 3980cc 24V supercharged straight six, 321 bhp, 378lb ft
Performance: 0-60mph 5.9 sec, 155mph
Tax: £155 **Insurance:** 20
Depreciation: £31,495

familiar turbo set up. Power delivery is seamless and strong. I also love like the fact that the M5, and there is traction control to help me out. Then again, pottering around in an M5 under normal traffic conditions is a sublimely relaxing experience, even though the Jag beats it for sheer cosiness. No, if you want raw, then the M5 grows in a hell-hound way that scares the XJR moggie. More amazing are the Formula One floating brake discs that bring the BMW to a rapid halt, arguably what really makes a fast car great.

If you want to find a decent M5, then Europe's leading M-car specialist, Munich Legends, surprisingly enough located in Sussex, is the M-ecca. Outside of BMW's own museum in Munich, you won't see more race and championship-winning M cars on display, or find more passion for the marque. Owner Tony Halse understands the appeal, 'What people like are the sensible running costs and the Germanic build quality. These cars do not attract unwanted attention. The best description I've ever heard was that these cars are Ferraris in a Saville Row suit. Buyers are enthusiasts and that is the key thing, when these successful professionals come into the showroom they usually become 12 years old again. My customers can have great fun at a track day on the Sunday, then use it on the school run on a Monday.'

He rates the 3.8 as the better car, but only because it

improved on the already astonishing 3.6. Certainly 3.6s are cheaper, and the best examples are £9k-£12k. 3.8s are in the £15k-£20k bracket, although the last 50 special-edition models in Rosso Red or Orinoco Green with a low mileage might be worth £25k.

Remember that weak MPV allusion I've been labouring? Well, BMW actually did go the multi-purpose route, even if only within the restricted confines of the elegant Touring shape. You do see them occasionally as personal imports and they will be left-hand drive only. Except that Munich Legends have converted the only right-hooker in the world for a customer who instantly gave the nod for the £12k surgery.

When it comes to looking at the latest-generation Jaguars in the metal, forget everything you've heard about sick cats constantly needing the vet, for '90s Jags are a breed apart. My conversation killer was to invite Edgbaston Specialist Cars to buy a 1978 4.2 Sovereign that happens to reside in my garage. I won't try that again. Anything pre-'94 is prehistoric, almost like the XJ40 never happened. Obviously destined for short-lived careers in banger racing, the specialists couldn't wait to move on to the X300. Stephen Hayes puts it down to the Ford influence, and a stratospheric rise in build quality.

'Servicing is vital. Jaguars respond to regular oil changes and the service intervals are every 10,000

miles. We've had cars that were good for 155,000 miles. The clock and I think they're through for 250k.'

What Hayes emphasises to me, is that there is no such thing as a cheap XJR, only a good-value one with a full service history which can also be maintained cost effectively. Indeed, when you buy from Edgbaston, they give you a top-rated list of specialist contacts, so that you can buy ZR-creed tyres for £105.

Without it you will be looking at liability. BMW M has hand-built an engine that will run to 200,000 miles. However, the big debate is whether or not you go for a timing-chain job at 100,000 miles. It was absolutely essential on the original E28 model, otherwise it would go ping very expensively.

You need money to buy and look after these cars, but not an outrageous amount. They are both affordable and astounding. In fact it has to be a *kerbcrawler* dead heat. I love the Jaguar's sense of occasion, yet adore that BMW ruthless arrogance. I know that pouncing round the Nürburgring, the M5 will be the more consistent and amusing companion, but then the Jag is so snug for the daily commute. So, if you have got more than one purpose in mind for your next super saloon, best to buy one of each.

JAMES RUPPERT

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