



# Baby on board

It doesn't scream for attention, quietly feeds off the road, and is comfortable in the back seat, this Jaguar F-Pace

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Porsche did it with the Cayenne, Lamborghini is going to do it with the Urus, that will come out next year, and recently Jaguar did it with the F-Pace.

These are all marques that are known to build sports cars with the sole purpose of pleasing the person at the wheel. In-car entertainment is the roar of the V-something demon under the hood, seat comfort is that mashing into the leather you feel when the car accelerates so quick it feels you've left your soul behind. Rear seat comfort? Ha! You've got to be kidding.

## A different track

So understandably, it is quite a different approach that marques like these have to take when they set out to build SUVs. First of all, they need to seat at least 5 in relative comfort, and the boot needs to have more space than just enough for a jacket. Secondly, the suspension and the insulation of the cabin need to be set up with the comfort of passengers in

mind. And, finally, since it is labelled an SUV, it needs to have decent off-road capability.

On a recent road trip to Wales in the United Kingdom, I discovered the Jaguar F-Pace accomplishes this with panache. This was a family road trip with one passenger in a child seat. And though we were four of us, including the baby, a (reasonably slim) fifth person could have easily been accommodated in the rear seat.

As Indians, we aren't really light packers, so luggage space was critical. Though I had to load the bags in a particular sequence, the boot swallowed up three big bags, three backpacks, a snack bag and a perambulator.

While the interiors of the F-Pace are very chic and ergonomic and quite intuitive, once you play around with the dials and switches, my only real grouse was the footwell for the driver. The wall of the centre console could rival a Welsh castle wall in height. This means your knee keeps knocking on



it. The footwell feels constrained like the footwell of a flatbed Business Class seat and takes some getting used to.

## Drive control

Also, when I had read that the car I was getting was the 2.0-litre 8-speed automatic with all-wheel drive, I was a tad sceptical about any kind of sportiness, given that we would be fully loaded with passengers and luggage. While on the slip road, merging onto the M4 during rush-hour traffic, I had to nip and tuck very quickly. I slipped the Jag out of Eco mode into Sport mode and



stepped down on the accelerator, and the SUV, never mind its hulky proportions, actually leapt forward like a big cat rushing towards its prey, with a burst of speed.

During the five days that I



spent with the car, I realised that Eco mode best suited sparsely trafficked roads. The sequential gearbox would change ratios early and the engine was hardly a murmur due to low revs. In

fact, it was an almost soothing murmur that often lulled the baby to sleep.

While on the subject of proportions, Wales isn't exactly known for its wide roads. In fact, because we were staying at farms and Airbnbs out in the country, the approach roads were incredibly narrow, bordered by tall hedges, or worse, stonewalls. But the F-Pace's precise steering made short work of all this. On the soul-stirring scenic but hair-raisingly narrow road from the ruins of Llanthony Priory to the Gospel Pass through the Brecon Beacons National Park, there were moments

when a delivery van or an ancient Land Rover driven by a ruddy farmer would come tearing around the corner, leaving a few milliseconds for correction, so that I could pass him without conflict. The Jaguar precisely went exactly where I pointed it. Its directional deference on those narrow roads was one of its most enduring attributes. Another was that it returned almost 44 miles to the gallon, which is about 19 kilometres to the litre.

While I really didn't get to put its off-roading capability to the test, on the way from Abergavenny to Machynlleth, the road was blocked by some stubborn sheep, and I drove off the tarmac into the bordering meadow to get around them. There was a sharp ditch between the grass and tarmac where I tried to get back onto the road, and thanks to the angle of approach, there was a moment when two wheels (the front left and rear right) were in the air, but the car pulled itself out with ease.

Jaguar likes to say that the F-Pace has sports-car DNA,

## JAGUAR F-PACE

**ENGINE:** 2.0-litre 4-cylinder all-wheel drive, turbocharged

**ENGINE DISPLACEMENT:** 1999 cubic centimetres

**MAXIMUM POWER:** 180 bhp

**MAXIMUM TORQUE:** 430Nm

**TRANSMISSION:** 8-speed automatic

**ACCELERATION:** 0 to 100km/h in 8.7sec

**MAXIMUM SPEED:** 208 kph

**PRICE:** Starts at ₹68.4 lakhs (ex-showroom, Delhi)

practicality and space. While the latter two are spot on, and the energetic 'Sport' mode does make it feel sporty, there is some roll during hard cornering, which hurriedly reminds you that this is after all an SUV more suited to touring rather than tearing up the tarmac.