

A FIRST TEST OF THE JAGUAR XK-E

They say it's one of the fastest series production cars ever offered to the public. Now a MOTOR TREND staff editor has put the machine through the gears against a stop watch

by Gordon Wilkins

JAGUAR'S REPUTATION was established by performance. The new E-type Gran Turismo is a formidable example of this tradition. It is unquestionably the fastest car to be made in quantity and offered to the public as a package. It handles and performs like a racing car, but is equally at home on the highway as a more docile passenger car.

The car I drove for this test was the fixed-head coupe — a long, low, lean machine which is physical proof that aerodynamic efficiency has obviously taken precedence over studio styling. For instance, the luggage trunk could have been larger if the underside of the tail were not swept up so sharply, but wind-tunnel tests showed that the drag would be increased, so the rising line remained. Things like this are evident throughout the car, and the XK-E is truly dedicated to performance.

A film record of the speedometer while I was driving out of town through mixed traffic shows the needle oscillating between 60 and 110 mph. The car will leap from 60 to 100 mph in 9½ seconds — just a few hundred yards of clear road. Standing-start acceleration is good too, as can be seen by these figures:

0-30, 2.9 seconds; 0-50, 5.2 seconds; 0-60, 7 seconds; and 0-100, 16.4 seconds. For the quarter-mile the XK-E finished at 14.9 seconds.

Excellent acceleration is only part of the story, and high-speed performance is extraordinary for a production car. At 100 mph I was still in third gear, ready to shift into top, with the tachometer touching the red sector which indicates 5500 rpm. It seems clear that the 150 mph estimated top speed is no exaggeration. The weekend traffic was too heavy for me to get a clear maximum speed run, but several times the speedometer went past 140 mph, with the car still accelerating strongly. With the optional 2.93 axle ratio, calculations show that the car should exceed 170 mph — and it probably will!

Although reactions to the performance are generally enthusiastic, there are mixed opinions about some other features of the car. Some feel that headroom, ease of entry and interior space have been sacrificed to streamlining. While this would be justified in a machine designed solely for competition use, it diminished its attraction for normal road work. Luggage space on the roadster is limited, and although the coupe has space inside, the luggage is in full view of passersby.

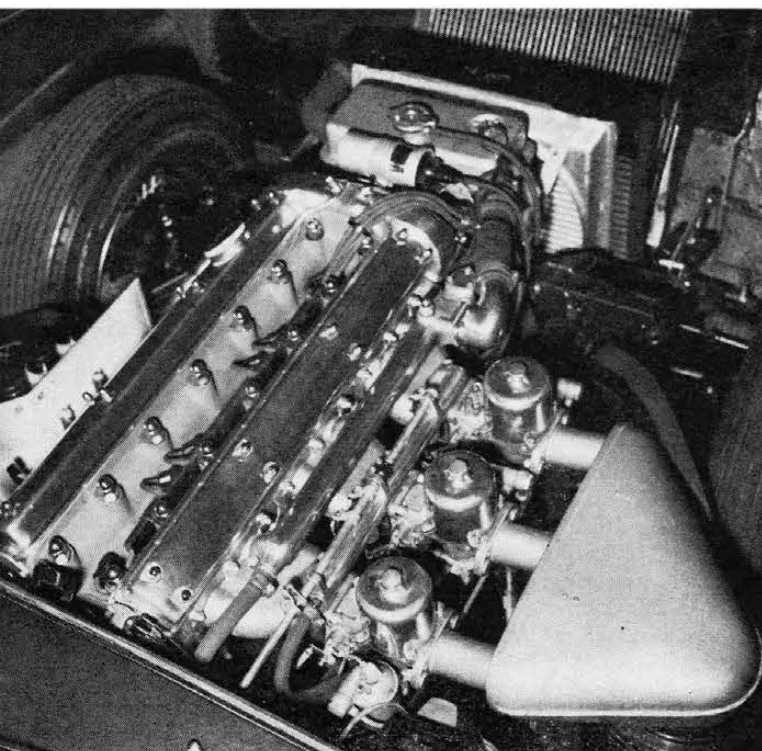
The wood-rimmed steering wheel is set at a good angle, and the column can be shortened to permit an extended-arm driving position without restricting kneeroom. Pedals are better arranged than on earlier Jaguar models, and heel and toe on brake and accelerator when shifting down before a corner is far simpler. All-around vision is free, thanks to the slim pillars, but the dropping line of nose and tail prevents the driver from seeing the extremities of the car.

The engine is surprisingly quiet, and no brutal methods are needed to obtain maximum acceleration — just hold the engine at about 2,000 rpm and drop the clutch in. There is a brief squeak from the tires, then the limited-slip differential takes charge and the car streaks away as though rocket-propelled.

The engine is so flexible that there is no need for gear changing in ordinary driving. In top gear the E-type will accelerate from 10 to 30 mph in about 5.7 seconds; 40 to 60 in 5 seconds; and 80 to 100 in about 5.7 seconds. This is particularly appreciated, as the gearbox, which is continued unchanged from previous models, is not the best feature of the car.

With this kind of acceleration, high speeds can be reached wherever there are a few hundred yards of clear road and in safety, for the brakes match the performance. They are Dunlop

The new Jaguar's in-line six-cylinder engine is rated at 265 hp; it is capable of speeds in excess of 170 mph. Note unusual air cleaner.



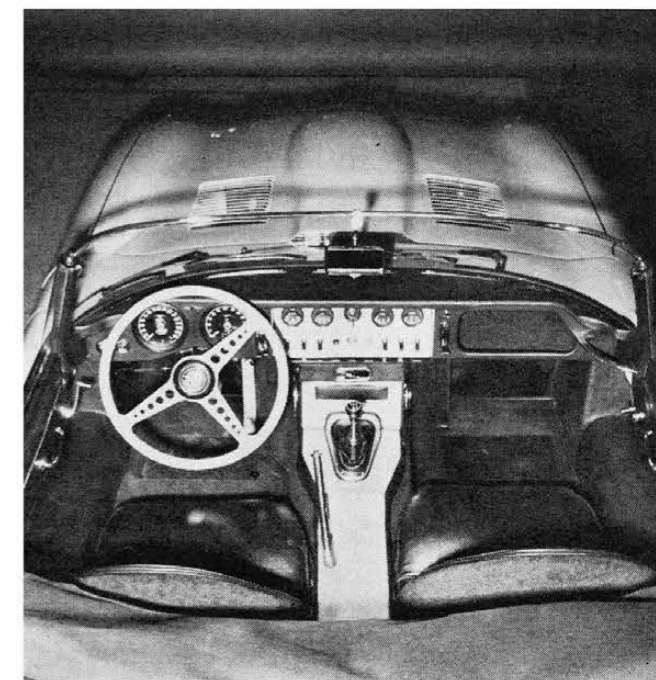
MT'S EUROPEAN EDITOR IN LONDON, GORDON WILKINS, WAS AMONG THE FIRST TO DRIVE THE SLEEK NEW E-TYPE GRAN TURISMO.

discs with a vacuum servo based on an American Kelsey Hayes design. Press firmly on the pedal at 100 mph, and the speed just melts away. Several times in succession I stopped the car from 100 mph in five seconds, which is close to the theoretical minimum possible. The XK-E came to a straight-line stop with no tendency to lock the wheels until the speed dropped below 35 mph, when a little skill had to be used to avoid locking the wheels and provoking a slide. Pedal pressure was reasonably light, and, of course, there was no trace of fade after repeated crash stops from high speeds.

Road holding is superb — the best on any Jaguar to date. Cornering fast, there is a small and consistent amount of understeer. With so much power available, the tail can be brought around by the throttle, but a driver accustomed to fast cars can control the angle, without having to learn any new tricks.

Two features will certainly cause a pleasant surprise: the quiet running and the riding comfort. Engine and mechanical noises have been damped down successfully, and wind noise does not intrude much below 100 mph. On the test car a slight rumble was caused by exhaust resonance when cruising at 100 mph. This is a function of exhaust pipe length, which is very critical, and a slight modification is reported to have eliminated it on later models. Riding comfort over all types of surface is outstanding for a very fast sports model, and it is a car in which one would look forward to traveling several hundred miles a day with little fatigue.

The XK-E, in my opinion, is the best thing Jaguar has ever done, and at prices only slightly higher than those of the XK models — \$6095 for the roadster and \$6320 for the coupe. /MT



Some drivers will find entry into the low car somewhat difficult, but once there, will be greeted by well-appointed, roomy compartment.