

# MOVES LIKE JAGGER

The 2020 Jaguar XE has the sassy looks of a siren and the power of the famous cat she's named after

WORDS AND PICTURES: Bobby John Varkey



# Y

**YOU KNOW** the kind of look-at-me car; the type that turns heads on the road and leaves many gawking! Add impressive specs to it and what you get is the 2020 Jaguar XE. It's a fantastically handsome sports sedan, just the right one to take you on the winding (and for the most part, dug up and slushy) roads to Manali to our destination – Larisa. It's a boutique resort set amidst an apple orchard in Haripur village, about 15km from all the tourist traps of the winter destination. That's almost 1,200km from Delhi, both ways.

But, oh, the car! The XE's slurp-worthy stance, accentuated by a facelift, is cut out for taking on the might of the Mercs and BMWs in the segment. It looks wider than its 2015 avatar, thanks to the redesigned grille and bumper – flared out a bit. Overall, it gives this entry level Jag a sense of exaggerated width. The all-LED lights, slimmer front and tail, and animated indicators make it look mean. It is a long sedan, but its curves and edges do a good job of hiding the overall bulk of the car.

Inside, the XE is dripping with tech. The completely refreshed cabin – with a wide touchscreen in the middle, two dials in the lower console for climate control, a toggle switch for different drive modes, slick virtual instrument cluster, a sporty stick-like shifter and a tweaked steering wheel – all add oodles of character to the interior.

From the driver's seat, everything looks conquerable. The seat is comfortable in posh leather upholstery and fancy stitching. You can set the driving position nice and low.

Take it out on the road, and the XE is pure exhilaration. We started from Delhi and ran straight into heavy rains on the highway. The almost-straight stretch of tarmac, for about 250km till Zirakpur outside Chandigarh, is where the XE showed its true blue blood. In Rain/Ice mode, the 8-speed electronic automatic transmission metered power carefully, with just the right amount of acceleration, but at its highest state of traction to the road.



# T

**THE JAGUAR XE IS A TOTALLY DIFFERENT CAR WHEN THE DYNAMIC MODE IS ROUSED. IT GETS YOU SURGING WITH AN URGENCY AND EAGERNESS WHEN YOU ARE OVERTAKING ON THE HIGHWAY OR CLIMBING THE HAIRPIN BENDS OF THE MOUNTAINS**

Upon being flicked into Dynamic mode, the 2-litre, 4-cylinder Ingenium engine, which makes 250bhp and 353Nm of peak torque, was absolute fun when left to make its own decision. The brute force was on display when you prodded it to take full control, in the manual mode. A totally different car in this mode, it gets you surging ahead with urgency when you are overtaking on the highway or climbing the hairpin bends of the mountains.

Post Chandigarh, the slushy, dug-up stretch near Aut, still 70km from our destination, was a nightmare, a crawl at best on the barely-there road. However, the XE seamlessly balances ride and comfort, handling and fun. In other words, it is unmatched.

Really, this sports sedan makes a strong case as the perfect road trip car. Its almost-isolated cabin, and unruffled ride on these roads is all that it takes to note that Jaguar has got the suspension and damping right. This one also has a driver fatigue sensor, where the system uses an internal timer along with optic sensors and driving style analysis to detect if the driver needs rest.

The exhilarating drive, followed by Manali's stop-start traffic – thanks to a fresh influx of tourists looking to soak in the most of the season's first snowfall in December – made us eager to reach the gorgeous luxury Larisa Resort offered. The almost 12-hour drive, up steep mountainsides and down winding valleys, on labyrinthine roads, ended at the gates of the stunning property, made even more beautiful with uninterrupted views of the snow-covered peaks, reddened by the setting sun.

Inspired by local language of Lahaul—La stands for that which is above; Ri, the mountain; and Sa, for the earth. Larisa is the first property Priya Thakur, ex-VP, sales and marketing of PVR Limited, started in 2015 when her father suggested she should get into the tourism industry. Since then, the group has set up properties in Goa, Mussoorie and Shimla.

There is something lyrical about Larisa's deluxe rooms. Large, wide windows overlooking the private garden or the pool, and the roughness of the stone walls contrast charmingly with the polished warmth of the wooden furniture. The walnut wood decor continues in the premier luxury suites too, with the jacuzzi right next to a floor-to-ceiling window, opening up to the snow-covered mountains in the distance that add to the charm. Each room, no matter the size, comes stocked with the finest amenities, the cosiest of living spaces, and fireplaces – not to mention, gorgeous views of the surrounding wonders.

Add to all this, the service is personal, reminding you of the warmth back home. “We were always clear about how we wanted this



## OUR VERDICT

*THE Jaguar XE scores high on its aggressive styling and the super smooth manner in which it cuts through swathes of traffic. It's a thoroughbred athlete on twisty mountain roads with its 2-litre, 8-speed automatic Ingenium engine teaming up perfectly well with great suspension and a responsive steering. The biggest plus? The dripping-with-tech driver's console and the swanky, luxurious seats. A perfect package, in every sense*





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EACH ROOM, NO MATTER THE SIZE, COMES STOCKED WITH THE FINEST AMENITIES, THE COSIEST OF LIVING SPACES, AND FIREPLACES — NOT TO MENTION, GORGEOUS VIEWS OF THE SURROUNDING WONDERS

resort to be,” said Priya. “Since I have lived in cities almost all my life, we wanted to build something that appealed to those who’ve come to us to unwind. That is also the reason we chose a location away from the main town.”

The secret behind the warmth Larisa exudes was revealed when Priya talked of its christening. “In our properties, the elements of sky, mountain and earth come together. The name was suggested by my mother, who wanted to give this name to her granddaughter. That did not work out and we decided to give our mother another baby called Larisa.”

Priya and her brother Puneet’s love for their guests is an extension of their passion for the property. “None of us are from the hospitality business, but we can vouch for the fact that we’ve left no stone unturned in ensuring our guests go back happy, only to come back as soon as they get a chance to spend a few days away from city life. We believe our standards are higher and more stringent than seasoned hoteliers,” said Puneet.

The sibling duo’s passion for luxury is reflected in the attention to the detail. From the rooms and the picnic-like canopies, to the activity area, which has a trampoline and a billiards table, right next to the swimming pool—as far as luxury goes, Larisa scores pretty high.

The drive back was smooth, for one thing the weather had cleared up and getting into cruise control mode allowed for more relaxed conversation with the XE’s Blind Spot Monitor and Blind Spot Assist virtually alerting one to obstacles and taking keeping track of other vehicles, especially when changing lanes. ♦



**OUR VERDICT**

Privacy and experience are two words that are synonymous with Larisa. Tucked away from the tourist traps of Manali, which tend to get crowded and unruly every time there is a fresh round of snowfall, this boutique resort set amidst an apple orchard, ticks all the right boxes. It’s the kind of complete resort that makes conversations engaging. The best part? Larisa successfully manages to add the right amount of dazzle without going over the top

**QUICK TAKE**

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