

XK-E PLUS TWO

Big brother to the XK-E coupe, the 2+2 offers two extra seats, an automatic transmission and grand touring, family-style.

BY BILL GAVIN



With the introduction of the XK-E 2+2, Jaguar has given every married man the rationale he's always dreamed of. We can hear it now: "Sure, honey, it looks racy, but see, it's got two seats in the back just like a big car." The craftsmen in Coventry, England, have given the XK-E coupe nine more inches between the wheels, two extra inches of headroom and two seats in the rear, and best of all, they have tacked only \$700 onto the coupe's \$5500 price tag, thereby keeping the 2+2 within reach of family-minded buffs.

Moreover, Jaguar seized the opportunity to do a little more than mere roof-raising and base-stretching. They've added an automatic transmission option and have tidied up the interior. But the most striking aspect of the 2+2 lies not in any radical differences—rather, it's noteworthy for its similarity to the XK-E coupe. In fact, the two are almost indistinguishable. Look at it from all sides, from the front, from the rear—even from above—and you'll detect almost no styling departures. Put it nose-to-nose with the coupe and the differences will still be unexaggerated. A longer door, a bigger windshield and a chrome strip to break up the possible topheavy effect of the taller 2+2 are the only obvious changes. Jaguar could see no reason to change the

XK-E's looks. Neither can we. It's been a runaway best-seller since its introduction. (In fact, back-orders of the regular coupe are frantically being filled, delaying the 2+2's debut by several months.)

A considerable amount of engineering went into those extra inches of wheelbase, particularly in the rear. The box-sectioned transverse chassis member behind the seats of the original XK-E has been eliminated. The longer-wheelbase version features an inverted channel section member to which the rear suspension is attached, and this more compact structure allows extra cockpit space. Jaguar has chosen to retain the 265-horsepower six-cylinder engine (though we've heard rumors concerning a V-12), and the baulk ring, all-synchromesh gearbox is still available with a 3.54 rear axle for a top speed of 130 mph. The 3-speed automatic transmission available on the 2+2 has a slightly higher 3.31 final drive. This is a Borg Warner Model 8 transmission with a torque converter coupling between the engine and the hydraulically-operated 3-speed planetary gearbox. The selector and quadrant are mounted on the transmission tunnel. The two forward drive positions give the driver fairly effective control of what gears are engaged. In D₁, the car starts

in first gear and changes up automatically; a kickdown enables the driver to select intermediate or low gear appropriately. The D₂ gear will start the car in the intermediate range and change to top; from top, kick-down will select only the intermediate gear, which has an effect ratio range from as low as 9.67 up to 4.83.

The "+2" part of the New Jaguar is reasonably effective. The short rear seat squab and restricted leg room limit forward-facing passengers to children or very small adults. Engineers have allowed for the possibility of one adult sitting back there—but he'd have to ride sideways with his feet in the foot well on the opposite side of the car. Nevertheless, Jaguar feels that the success of the 2+2 is assured—not only in the family market, but also with its present clientele, for the 2+2 offers extra room to those who will continue to use it as a two-seater. With the driver's seat pushed back to the limit, even an over-six-footer has ample leg room, and as he pulls the adjustable steering wheel towards him, it rises enough for him to operate the accelerator and brake pedals without his thighs fouling the bottom of the rim. The back of the rear seat folds forward to extend the luggage platform and provides much more storage space than the standard coupe.

There's been a little face-lifting around the dashboard too. The glove compartment has been enlarged and given a lockable lid, and a useful new addition is a two-part shelf beneath each side of the dashboard. It's not much use for parcels, but has sufficient depth to accommodate a stereo tape deck as well as the motorist's personal bric-a-brac.

The 2+2 weighs a couple of hundred pounds more than the standard XK-E, but this affects the acceleration only slightly. Likewise, the increased frontal area has little effect on maximum speed. The nine inches added to the wheelbase and overall length have, of course, broadened the diameter of the turning circle—you need 41 feet to get the 2+2 around compared with 37 for the normal XK-E. This could have been an excuse to list power steering as an option, but purists will be pleased to hear that Jaguar hasn't even considered that so far. Roadholding is said to be unimpaired by the tailoring, and the ride is now a little flatter—a decided improvement.

The XK-E was greatly improved two years ago with the installation of a torquey 4.2-liter engine, a better clutch, lighter brake pedal and all-synchromesh gearbox. It became, at that point, a suitable car for ladies, including your timid maiden aunt. With the 2+2, Jaguar is offering the family man the ideal wish-fulfillment package. Men will tell their wives it's a family car, and all kinds of nice, young mothers will be hoodwinked by those two rear seats and the automatic transmission. They'll stow little Dick and Jane in the back and before they know it, they'll be Grand Touring in the finest European fashion. There are, to use the British understatement, worse ways to be hoodwinked.

C/D

