

## TEST DRIVE: JAGUAR F-TYPE COUPE R

We go trackside with Jaguar's supercharged roadster, the F-Type Coupe R

Jan Tegler  
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The helmeted gentleman extending his hand in front of a striking red example of Jaguar's new F-Type Coupe R was instantly recognisable. We smiled as we shook hands with Davy Jones - a man who in that single moment united a storied bit of Jaguar's past with its present.

Flashback 24 years and you'd find the American open-wheel and sports car ace at the helm of one of Jaguar's most iconic race cars - the XJR-12. Jones teamed with co-drivers Jan Lammers and Andy Wallace to win the renowned 24 Hours of Daytona in a factory-backed, "Silk Cut"-sponsored XJR-12 from Tom Walkinshaw Racing in 1990.

And here he was, inviting us to take the driver's seat in the new coupe version of Jaguar's much-praised F-Type for laps at Willow Springs Raceway, an hour north of Los Angeles. We had already whetted our appetites for the sharpest version of the coupe with a drive up the magnificent Angeles Crest Highway through the San Gabriel Mountains to the track.

Now it was time to explore Jaguar's Porsche 911-fighter on the nine-turn, 2.5-mile roller coaster that is Willow Springs. Introduced at the Los Angeles Auto Show last November, the fixed-roof, two-door promised even more than the F-Type roadster, which has been on the

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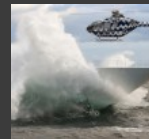
I once had to design a dining room table 'strong enough to dance an Irish jig upon' ... That was quite an unusual brief!

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market since last summer.

The R wrings an additional 55 horsepower and 56 Nm (680 total) of torque from the same 5.0 litre supercharged V8 found in its range-topping F-Type V8 S convertible sibling. Jaguar claims the R runs to 100 km/h in 4.2 seconds, a couple tenths quicker than the drop-top V8 S. Accelerating out of the pits toward turn one in “Dynamic” driving mode with the throttle pinned, the R certainly feels faster than the V8 S – and quicker than the official acceleration time Jag provides.



Jones instructs us on the proper line through Willow Springs' high-speed corners and tricky elevation changes. After a couple laps we begin to place the car correctly and get on the gas, confirming that the difference in power between the R and the V8 S is most noticeable when accelerating away from corner apex where the Coupe R's extra torque becomes obvious.

The other element drivers of the latest F-Type will appreciate immediately is the Coupe's fantastically rigid aluminium unibody chassis. It's no surprise that the fixed-roof model is stiffer than the drop-top F-Type, but the reward for Coupe R pilots is a chassis truly worthy of its powerplant. Working in concert with stiffer springs and adaptive dampers, the specially tuned chassis delivers great handling. That rigid underpinning also pays dividends in steering that provides better feedback than that found in many other contemporary sports cars.

Turn-in is crisp, partially due to Jaguar's Torque Vectoring system which applies “finely metered braking torque individually to the inner wheels”, to help rotate the Coupe R.



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Pulling into the pits to cool down after a few laps, we chatted enthusiastically with Davy about racing and the 24 Hours of Le Mans (taking place that weekend), another endurance classic Jones won in 1996. We also had time to admire the Coupe R's styling. The F-Type roadster looks terrific, but the Coupe is even more to our taste with its sweeping roofline and a rear window that reminds us of the E-Type coupe.

The cabin is also well done with supportive leather buckets that provided all-day comfort. Materials are high quality throughout with contrast-stitching on the instrument panels, door panels, grab-handle highlight and console.

What really sends chills up the spine is the sound of this new cat from Coventry. Though we're taken with the roar of the C7 Corvette we have to admit, no other V8-powered machine sounds as good as the Coupe R - and that's an integral part of its appeal.

The Coupe R is alive in a way its prime target - the 911 - isn't. We suspect the fast cat seated next to us as we took to the track again would agree.

See more on the Jaguar webpage



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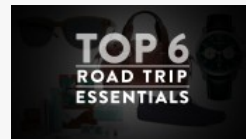
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