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JAGUAR CLAWS OUT

The mildly strained look on the faces of the Jaguar marketing brigade – and the occasional frown – reflected our after-drive banter about a seriously impressive automobile hobbled by pricing, exchange rates, unlikely competitors and whether anyone really buys into that posh Brit schtick. Nut for nut and bolt for bolt Jaguar's new sedan is a mighty achievement that should earn the brand a legion of new followers. The problem is – locally at any rate – price. With the cheapest XE coming in at R534 800, no amount of spin can realistically disguise the gulf to the German equivalents costing at least 50 grand less. (Okay, we do realise that often those equivalents

exclude options included as standard on the Jag.)

But it's the best driver's car, they say. So on to the drive. For a day and a half we journeyed through the winelands and way out to the Little Karoo. Sadly, fog and heavy traffic applied an involuntary cruise control to much of our progress – particularly the part that involved the top 250 kW supercharged V6 version. Still, I can report that the 2,0-litre petrol that was my first drive demonstrated eye-widening overtaking ability. If pressed, I would say that my favourite was the last-driven of the trio of engines, the new Ingenium 2-litre turbodiesel. Never before has 132 kW and 430 N.m of small-capacity diesel felt this

refined, this muscular and, yes, this economical: 4,9 litres/100 km indicated.

In any guise, then, the XE really, truly, feels like a Jaguar should. Sporty. Suave. Sophisticated. Will that be enough to stave off the German forces, though? – AD

