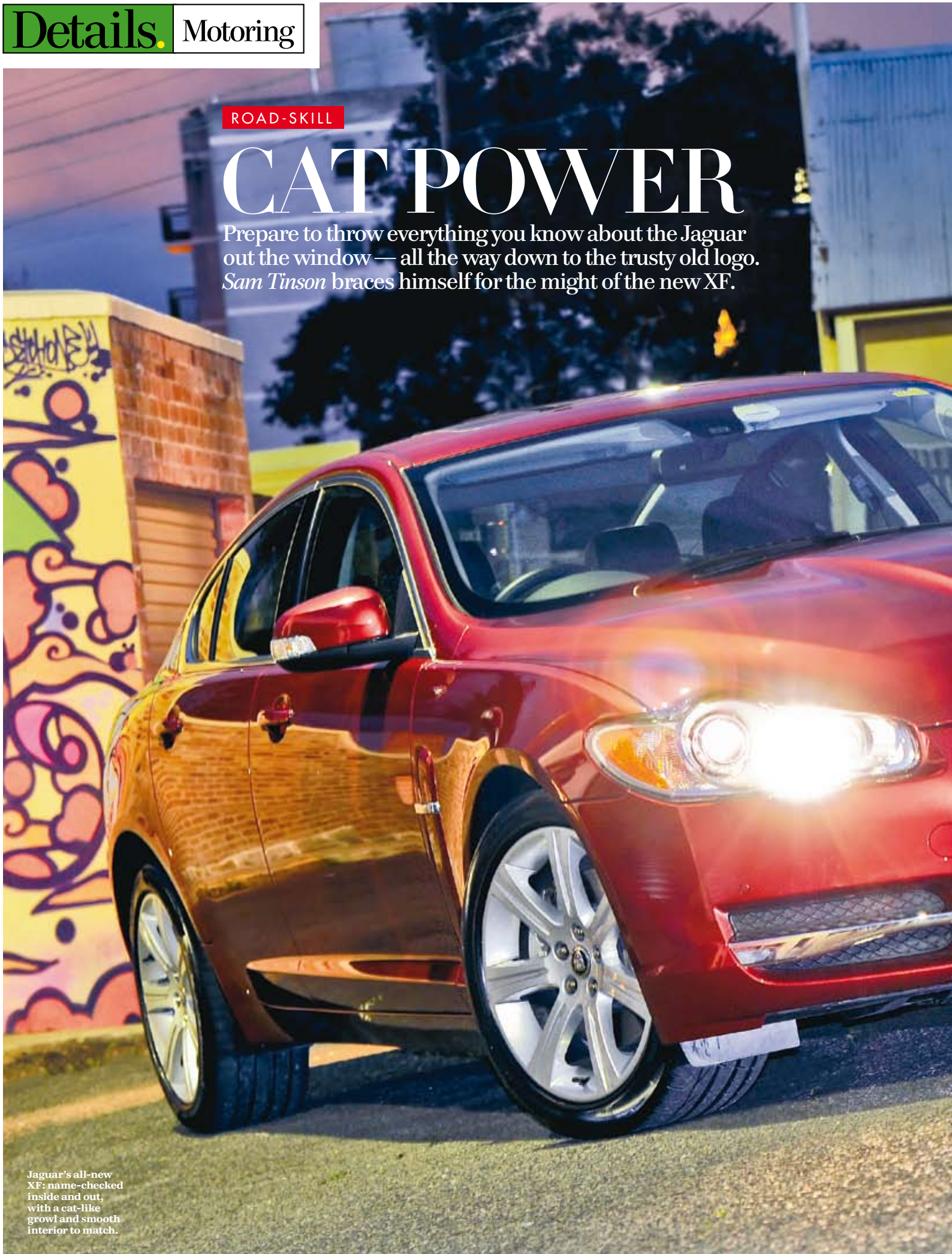


ROAD-SKILL

CAT POWER

Prepare to throw everything you know about the Jaguar out the window — all the way down to the trusty old logo. *Sam Tinson* braces himself for the might of the new XF.



Jaguar's all-new XF: name-checked inside and out, with a cat-like growl and smooth interior to match.



EVERYONE, IT SEEMS, HAS

A CHILDHOOD MEMORY of riding in a Jaguar. Usually, it was a tatty old XJ6 belonging to your Uncle Bert. Bert was invariably a boozy old duffer with a toupé and a double-breasted blazer with gold buttons. And like him, the Jag had seen better days. The leather was baggy, the suspension saggy and the clutch laggy, and it reeked of cigars and Old Spice (the aftershave — not Posh's mum). But it was still a Jag: a British legend, a blood relative of the iconic E-Type. The Saint drove a Jag. Jags were, once, very cool.

And then, suddenly, they weren't. Uncle Bert got done for kiddie porn. Everyone quit smoking and started doing Pilates. And gentlemen swapped Old Spice for Hugo Boss. Instead of The Saint, we got Austin Powers and his Shaguar. The glory days of the E-Type, the coolest car ever, suddenly seemed a very, very long time ago, and all at once Jaguar found itself as fashionable as a Beatles hairdo.

Which brings us to the Jaguar XF, a car upon whose sculpted flanks the future of an entire brand now rests. Uncle Bert is dead and buried, as is his Chesterfield sofa, say Jag's marketing wonks. And, just in case we were in any doubt as to the new target demographic, at the car's launch, they showed us pictures of young athletic types with iPods and Motorolas. The XF is iPod-friendly, they assured us. Its interior mood lighting was inspired by a mobile phone. It's one hip, happening, with-it cat, with a new badge to prove it (the famous growling feline now resembles a character from *Thundercats*.)

So, is this the car to turn around the fortunes of a brand, or merely the world's most expensive MP3 player? That depends on how you look at it (literally). Approached from the rear three-quarter angle, the XF is a good deal sexier than its stuffy-looking predecessor, the S-Type. Designer Ian Callum used to be on Aston Martin's books, and there's more than a trace of his DB7 and Vanquish about the new Jag's haunches. (This is unlikely to garner too many complaints from *GQ*. We've been known to stare at an Aston's backside for days on end without blinking.)

Likewise, the XF in profile, with its coupé-like silhouette, short front and rear overhangs, 18-inch seven-spoke alloys and twin shark-gill air vents, is pure automotive eye-candy. The front end, though, requires some chin-scratching. Sure, there are elements of Jaguar's core DNA here, but a few too many Lexus chromosomes (and perhaps, dare I say it, even one or two from Volvo) seem to have found their way into the mix. There's no leaping cat on the bonnet, either. That aside, however, it's a bold departure from the S-Type, and will certainly turn heads.

Perhaps the best view of the XF is from inside. The cockpit has all the modern design cues necessary to befuddle the pipe-and-slippers brigade and attract a more Facebook-ing, podcast-ing punter.

The dash is an unbroken curve of matt-finished wood and brushed aluminium, surrounding the driver like a retro-futurist mini-bar. The instruments are illuminated with a cool blue LED trim (inspired by the Motorola Razr phone), and the ignition button glows red and

pulses enticingly much like the light on a sleeping Apple Mac.

Expat poms missing the motherland are even indulged with a Union Jack screensaver option, although since Jaguar is now owned by Indian mega-conglomerate Tata, perhaps an image of Ganesh would be more appropriate.

The whacky innovation continues on the centre console. In a feat of 'let's see if we can slip this past the boss' frivolity, the design boffs have done away with the gearstick altogether, replacing it with a chunky rotating dial that emerges from the fascia into your palm when you hit the ignition. Even the air-conditioning vents are hidden until you start the engine, wherein they revolve out from their

"ALL THE POWERPLANTS SOUND LIKE A BIG CAT SHOULD — GROWLY, PROWL AND READY TO POUNCE."

aluminium panels like machine guns in a Bond car. It would feel gimmicky if it weren't so well executed.

Once all the special effects are over and you get on the road, the XF feels disappointingly tame in its 3-litre petrol V6 form. Off the line, it just doesn't have the power to match its racy looks. Much more satisfying is the 2.7-litre turbodiesel variant, which has the low-end grunt befitting a \$100k-plus luxury sports sedan. If money nor the environment are of concern, then the range-topping 4.2-litre supercharged V8 option is, as Austin Powers might say, shagtastic.

Jaguar are masters of a great engine note, and across the range the powerplants sound like a big cat should — growly, prowly and ready to pounce. Another Jaguar strongpoint is ride quality, and the XF proves that comfort and cornering ability need not be mutually exclusive. Pick your engine wisely and this is a very satisfying steer; handling sporty and sure, helped by an arsenal of electronic suspension wizardry and, Jaguar claims, the stiffest chassis in its class.

That class includes competition from the German triumvirate of BMW, Audi and Mercedes. BMW's usual trump card is rear-wheel drive, which the XF has, as well as more sex appeal than an E-Class and an interior that beats Audi.

Whether or not this will lure punters away from the big Germans will depend on how successful Jaguar have been in exorcising the ghost of Uncle Bert. If this car can't see him off, nothing will. **GQ**

YOU NEED TO KNOW

Engine 3.0-litre V6
Power 175kW @ 6,800rpm / 293Nm @ 4100rpm
Economy 10.5 litres per 100km
Price from \$105,500
Enquiries www.jaguar.com.au; (02) 9020 1400



HATCH POINTS.

GQ thinks small and zippy, testing the metal of the latest compact contenders on the road.

HONDA CIVIC R

2.0 litre i-VTEC 4 cyl;
 6sp manual
POWER 148kW
TORQUE 193Nm
 0-100km/h: 6.6s; top speed 235km/h

PRICE from \$39,990
 The anti-Lexus: Mantovani lovers need not apply. Looks like a starship, behaves like a child genius gone feral. Highly strung engine and hard-arsed chassis reward those prepared to meet its demands for attention. Live near the red line and feed it lots of corners.



BMW 130i

3.0 litre 6 cyl, 6sp manual or auto
POWER 195kW
TORQUE 315Nm
 0-100km/h: 6.1s; 250km/h top speed
PRICE from \$58,900

The world's best sixer turns BMW's compact into a discreetly muscled-up nugget. Suspension favours

handling over ride, but Luxe cabin boasts six bags, power everything and climate control to help justify its cut-above price tag.



RENAULT SPORT MEGANE RS R26

2.0 litre intercooler turbo 4 cyl; 6sp manual
POWER 168kW
TORQUE 310Nm
 0-100km/h: 6.4s
PRICE from \$43,990

Low profile in Australia belies near-universal acclaim for a car that many pundits place at the top of the hot-hatch tree. Hit 'go' and a 168kW wallop hits the tar through front wheels via ultra sticky Michelin Pilots on 18-inch alloys, with limited slip diff keeping torque steer miraculously near zero. Austere interior (save for sports seats) bolsters suggestions this is one for the purists. Snap one up now — word is it's a future collector's piece.



MINI COOPER S JOHN COOPER WORKS KIT

1.6 litre turbo 4 cyl;
 6sp manual gearbox
POWER 155kW
TORQUE 260Nm
 0-100km/h: 6.5s; top speed 238km/h
PRICE: from \$48,000

Extensive engine and brake modes from the original Cooper garage give reincarnated Mini extra beef to go with its retro demeanour. Leather, sports seats, carbon fibre and JCW badging break the news when the car is still. Fast and fun, even without optional rooftop decal.



SUBARU WRX STI

2.5 litre intercooler turbo 4 cyl; 6sp manual

POWER 221kW

TORQUE 407Nm

0-100km/h: 5.2s

PRICE from \$59,990

Bigger all round than the model it replaces, hardcore hi-spec WRX is quieter, softer and altogether more grown-up as it heads for BMW 3/Audi A4 territory. Until you floor it. Upgraded engine with wider power band gives those steroidal flanks their punch line.



VW R32

3.2 litre V6; 6sp manual or DSG

POWER 184kW

TORQUE 320Nm

0-100km/h: 6.2s; (DSG)

PRICE from \$54,990

A \$20,000 premium gets you everything the world loves about the Golf GTI, with two extra cylinders for lots more poke and AWD to put it to tar. A politely alpha body kit, 18-inch alloys and twin-butt hole pipes tell the story outside; leather seats, climate control and lots of toys inside. A hoot.



MAZDA3 MPS

2.3 litre intercooler turbo 4 cyl; 6sp manual

POWER 190kW

TORQUE 380Nm

0-100km/h: 6.1s

PRICE from \$38,750

Unassuming looks belie the turbo 3's huge grunt. Limited slip diff keeps torque steer — the nemesis of powerful front wheel drives (FWDs) — manageable, while big vented front discs pull it up as fast as it goes. Six airbags come to the rescue if your reflexes don't match its muscle. A luxury upgrade adds leather, Bose audio-sonic wonders and xenon lamps. Nice.



5-point plan > Test-drive the Toyota Corolla

It boasts a sleek, modern exterior and a dynamic, sophisticated interior, as designed at ED2, Toyota's European Design Studio. Add outstanding performance from a 100kW dual VVT-i engine, with 6-speed manual or 4-speed automatic transmission, et voila: the best Corolla yet.