

VEHICLES

Effing Fantastic

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Caroline Phillips takes a long drive behind the wheel of the new Jaguar.

The iconic E-Type Jag was the most beautiful car ever made. Or so said Enzo Ferrari. Jaguar hasn't made a sports car since. So it's a tough act for the F-Type to follow. Will it succeed?

We're given the entry-level V6 model. You can hear us coming – which is great. We set off with a ROAR from its centre-mounted twin exhaust pipes. It causes stirs of excitement and ripples of attention – especially from men. After all, it's the most talked-about British sports car of the moment.

As we traverse London, we realise this is a car for fast, flat roads and Formula One racetracks – take a speed bump at anything faster than a narcoleptic snail's pace, and you'll probably take off the chassis. It's automatic – which makes driving a tad dull. But if you're a car geek, you can override this by using something called the paddle shifters, to make it manual.

Once we're on the M1 (en route to the Lake District and then Scotland) it's very smooth and deliciously fast.

Now I don't understand anything technical, but I'm told it has a 3.0-litre V6 supercharged petrol engine, 340PS, 0 to 60 in 5.1 seconds (that bit I understand) and a top speed of 161mph. (But why they didn't go for 161.5 mph, nobody tells me.) And, oh yeah, the body weighs just 260kg. Which – rather than being of heavy, rust-prone steel – is made of riveted aluminium.

When my husband is driving, I devour car manuals and motor reviews. I'm soon sufficiently car nerdy to be able to hold my own with the best of long-bonneted-beauty fans.

By the time we reach the Lake District, we return after a pit stop to our F-Type to find people photographing themselves beside it. "It was designed by Ian Callum who designed the Aston Martin Vanquish," I declare knowledgeably. "And it costs £58,500." It starts to rain as it does inevitably in these parts – and we put the roof up in less than 12 seconds.

By the time we reach Scotland, we're in automotive nirvana. The car is easy to drive, light and urges you to drive speedily. I put my foot down to the floor and soon the dial is shouting, 'Illegal and watch out you'll get points.' Luckily there's an eight-speed, quickshift transmission to get the power down and spoil the fun.

Soon there are Scottish road signs that read, 'Be a courteous driver' – we could do that if anyone could keep up with our speed – and 'Fit the correct car child seat' – but we probably couldn't do that as there are only two seats. In fact there's only room in the boot for an overnight bag, a little Tumi one at that.

So is it worth the half-century wait since Jaguar last unveiled a two-seater sports car? Yes, yes, yes! It's the best of British. When Frank Sinatra saw the E-Type, he said, "I want that car and I want it now." Likely he's trying to slip the F-Type through the Pearly Gates right now. But he'll have a fight on his hands – the young and cool will be scrambling to get it.

www.jaguar.co.uk/f-type.

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