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NEW JAGUAR XE

Boston to Bermuda in diesel saloon*



*That's Boston in Lincs and Bermuda in Warks...

Flat out in new Audi R8

Looks like the old one, but is it better?



Flat out in new Audi R8
Looks like the old one, but is it better?



AROUND THE WORLD IN A DAY

For our first UK taste of the fleet-friendly, diesel-powered Jaguar XE, we needed to cover some serious miles. **Richard Webber** was given a road atlas and told to visit as many international places as possible... without leaving the country

PHOTOGRAPHY WILL WILLIAMS



NEW YORK, MELBOURNE, Bermuda... there's nothing like an exotic road trip. And this is nothing like an exotic road trip, because we're talking about New York in Lincolnshire, Melbourne in Derbyshire and Bermuda in Warwickshire.

These three internationally renowned place names appear as waypoints on the 330-mile itinerary we're tracing around the heart of England to see how the box-fresh Jaguar XE – in benefit-in-kind-beating 2.0 diesel form – fares when faced with a long day in the life of a company car. And although we're no Phileas Foggs, photographer Will Williams and I are hoping to uncover some of the exoticism hidden among these green and pleasant lands.

8.53am Northampton services, M1

Although neither green nor pleasant, Northampton services at junction 15a of the M1 is a handy place to meet Williams and our Polaris White XE. The car is in Portfolio spec, which is the plushest of the four trim levels available on cooking models and, at £35,425, splits the difference between the cheapest XE – the cloth-upholstered, £26,990, 197bhp petrol four-pot SE – and the range-topping, £44,865 XE S that packs the 335bhp supercharged V6 from the F-Type.

A stack of extras adds around £10k to our car's price – unrepresentative of the norm but worthy in terms of letting us trial features such as adaptive suspension (£800), head-up display (£1000) and driving position memory pack with folding door mirrors (£935). Adaptive cruise control (£1500) is the only omission that frequent trips like this might justify.

After brimming the fuel tank, there's a moment to appreciate the cabin before we depart. Leather and soft-touch finishes abound – you have to reach down to the door bins to find anything more brittle – and there's a definite feeling of luxury, although the dark tones in our car conspire with the chunky, high-set centre console to make the cabin seem cosy more than airy. →

Northampton services on the M1 is the starting point for our journey; InControl multimedia system is slick and can easily be integrated with a smartphone



After brimming the fuel tank, there's a moment to appreciate the cabin before we depart



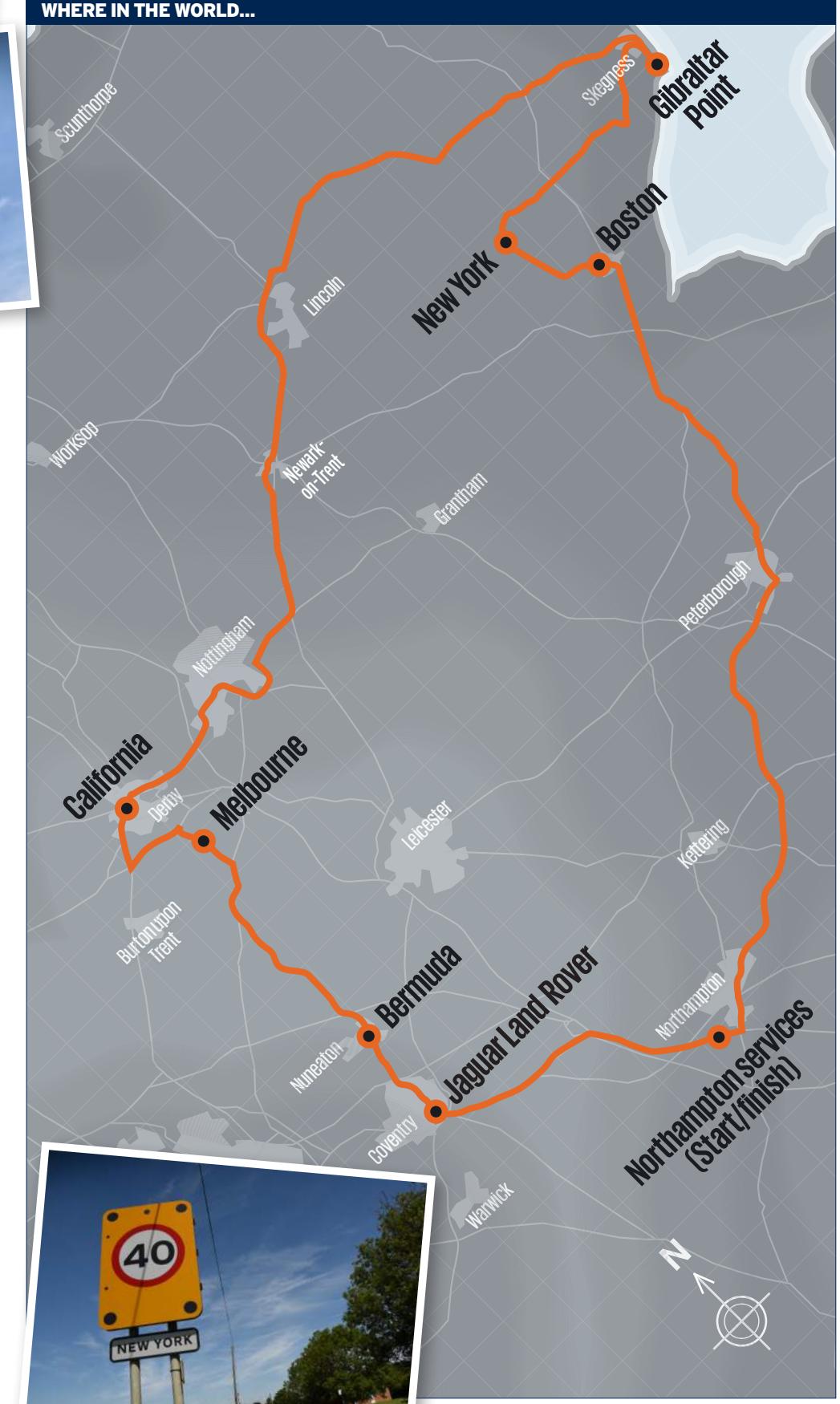
On a steady throttle at 70mph in top gear, the 2.0-litre diesel Ingenium engine is silent

You're never far from a bridge in the Boston environs, but the XE takes their varied surfaces in its stride to maintain a composed, comfortable ride



Scouting through the road atlas (left) reveals that, as in the US, the UK's New York (bottom) is not a million miles away from Boston

WHERE IN THE WORLD...



The sweeping top of the dashboard crowns a handsome, interesting environment, though, and the rotary selector for our car's eight-speed automatic gearbox complements the layout where a manual gearlever might interrupt it. A poke around the rear cabin reveals enough knee room for one 6ft 2in-tall person to sit behind another, although head and shoulder room are tight. With my driving position stored (easy) and the sat-nav, standard across the range, set (equally simple, subject to a little software latency), we're off.

11.03am Boston, Lincolnshire – 80.1 miles

Unlike many of our waypoints, this one did actually give its name to its more famous counterpart. Puritans from this Lincolnshire town named Boston, Massachusetts in 1630, 143 years before all that tea was wasted and things got awkward with the homeland.

Our route to Boston takes us on a succession of wide, benign A-roads, including the A1139 Frank Perkins Parkway through Peterborough, which, aptly for us, is named for the local engineer who made waves in industry and agriculture with his diesel engine designs. But that's not to reflect on our XE's powerplant, which, at 178bhp, is the more powerful of the two all-new, home-grown 2.0-litre four-pot turbodiesel Ingenium engines available. (The other produces 161bhp and a tax-dodging 99g/km of CO₂ in manual form.)

Indeed, while agricultural aspersions are sometimes cast at its classmates, the XE's engine is blessedly smooth. It becomes vocal in the upper reaches but not coarse. On a steady throttle at 70mph (1500rpm in eighth gear), it's silent. Gently flex the right ankle and nothing more than a deep hum comes back. The electric steering is very settled at a cruise, and the easy-going ride impresses, too. On a smooth surface, the notability of a little wind noise speaks of refinement elsewhere, although the big, optional 19in wheels roar a bit over rougher blacktop as we approach Boston. But with the mighty 'Broken Stump' of St Botolph's Church towering above its centre, we barely graze the town before the need to make early headway pushes us on.

11.50am New York, Lincolnshire – 92.1 miles

The 15-minute amble from Boston to the tiny, crossroad-hugging hamlet of New York throws up a pair of apposite opposites within a mile. →

AD

At the Witham and Blues New York Bar and Grill in Lincolnshire, they count a police cruiser and this yellow cab among their props

← St Gilbert's Church at Brothertoft couldn't look more English or quaint if it was built on a sound stage at Pinewood. Then, just over the River Witham, we come across the 'Witham and Blues New York Bar and Grill', guarded by a yellow cab, a police cruiser and an oversized Uncle Sam. We'd planned to find a 'New York' road sign to mark our visit, but this place – as native to Lincolnshire as crampions and carabiners – ticks the box better than we could have hoped for.

Then we take a series of arrow-straight lanes linked by right-angled corners. Raised above horizonless fields of swaying grain, they zig-zag through The Fens. Heavy subsidence makes these among the bumpiest roads I've ever driven – not in terms of potholes and seams, but lumps and humps that befuddle the concept of camber.

To give the XE's adaptive dampers a workout that no engineering rig could match, I stick to 60mph where a more natural pace would be 40mph, tops. It's a proper helter-skelter, but with on-board processors pulsing away like Alan Turing's brain, the chassis feels entirely stable and the helm remains confidence-inspiring. That such suppleness is punctuated by pointy, nose-led incisiveness through those corners is impressive.

We dive into Lincolnshire Aviation Heritage Centre. What a find. Formerly RAF East Kirkby, the site hosted Bomber Command Squadrons 57 and 630 between 1943 and 1945, its Avro Lancasters peltting targets from Berlin to Berchtesgaden. Now a museum, it holds Lancaster NX611, 'Just Jane', which operates passenger taxi rides during its continuing restoration.

As wartime music drifts across the sun-drenched airfield and its pristine outbuildings, there's an Arcadian charm to the place, but the memorial chapel soberingly recalls the sacrifice of 848 air crew during the conflict. If you're tempted to visit, keep the August bank holiday free; a 'Props and Pistons' event promises period aircraft displays and myriad exotic cars.

2.00pm Gibraltar Point, Lincolnshire – 129.1 miles

Gibraltar Point coastal reserve stretches from Skegness to The Wash, but our hopes of a seaside snap are quashed by a thick band of salt marsh and dunes, so we turn tail into Skegness. On one of the hottest days of the year, the resort town is bustling and traffic forces staccato progress. Trundling about, sharp lateral ridges ring out a bit – the only fly in the ice-cream we discover when it comes to the XE's otherwise excellent suspension set-up.

The engine stop-start system could also be better, because it can restart unexpectedly, sometimes with a bit of a jolt. Otherwise, the car makes a relaxed companion in town. The gearbox shuffles gently and the steering is usefully light at low speed, while the rear-view camera (from £530) and big door mirrors make up for the rear window's relative slowness.

5.47pm California, Derbyshire – 232.0 miles
'Skegness to California' could be a reality show about thirsty English 20-somethings transplanted to America's west coast, but there is no Butlins-to-Baywatch adventure for us; our →



With on-board processors pulsing away like Alan Turing's brain, the chassis is entirely stable



Take control via the paddles and gearbox responses are sharp and the gearshifts rapid



This California is far from the US west coast but near the UK east coast and Skegness (above); Swarkestone Bridge (below) is historic

California is a suburb of Derby. The 100-mile stint is the day's longest and lets us stretch the XE's legs. It has been said that the ZF gearbox is a mite slow to kick down, but for the swift yet steady driving style called for by this moderately busy route, it responds quickly enough. Take control via the paddles and responses are sharp and the shifts rapid, although the mapping seems harsh during full-throttle upshifts, which jolt a little in a way you'd associate with more powerful drivelines.

On which note, this being the beefier diesel, I'd expected more pace. Our car's 7.4sec to 60mph is respectable but no more, and there's little drama to the acceleration. It picks up well from 2000rpm and pulls strongly all the way to the 4750rpm limiter, and there's scant lag, but it's a different experience from the XE's boostier Bavarian counterpart. On this kind of trip, the Ingenium is fitter for purpose, but it won't slingshot you back-round fun. You pays your money...

6.49pm Melbourne, Derbyshire – 251.5 miles
The short hop to the pretty market town of Melbourne crosses the incredible 17-arch, 13th-century Swarkestone Bridge over the River Trent. At nearly a mile end to end, it's the longest stone bridge in England. Its narrowness requires several three-pointers as I drive back and forth for photos, manoeuvres made simple by the rotary gear selector. Whichever Jaguar Land Rover car it's in, I still find it unequalled for convenience. We pause briefly to snap Melbourne Post Office, whose namesake Down Under opened in 1837 to mark the naming of Australia's second city.

7.58pm Bermuda, Warwickshire – 283.3 miles
The British Bermuda is a disappointingly drab industrial zone just outside Nuneaton, but there's exotica of sorts here as we happen across



JAGUAR INCONTROL: AN APPY MEDIUM

IN-CAR TECH has too long been a weakness for Jaguar, but the XE's InControl touchscreen multimedia package (standard on all XEs) marks a leap forward. It is, at last, competitive and seamlessly hooks up with our car's handy head-up display. InControl also integrates and harnesses your smartphone's computing power.

After a two-minute registration and set-up, InControl Remote let us connect to the XE remotely via an iPhone, so we could cool the car while grabbing lunch in the Skegness sunshine, then beep the horn and flash the lights to help locate it in the vast beachfront car park. You can also check the fuel level or plot a route back to the vehicle, and automatic journey logging lets you pull up a route map and detailed metrics for each stint in the car, all exportable in a spreadsheet via email – handy for recording business miles and keeping tabs on fuel economy.

There's also InControl Apps, whereby a growing selection of smartphone apps can be controlled via the XE's touchscreen. Contacts, calendar and music integration aren't ground-breaking, but other options include conference call software, audio books and a hotel booking app.

InControl Apps suggested hotels near Jaguar's HQ (below) in Whitley, near Bermuda, if we had wanted to call it a night there

a modified car meet. Among the vehicles present is a most unlikely Jaguar X-Type; Jag-mad (or just plain mad) Perry's car features a hydraulic lift system. On arrival, he drops the chassis so that the rolled-out wheel arches smother the 19in, 255mm-section XF rear wheels he has stuffed into each corner. It's barmy, but entertaining. He loves the XE, too, although we whisk it away before he tries to fit it with Range Rover rims.

9.02pm Jaguar HQ, Coventry – 297.4 miles

We couldn't pass Coventry without stopping at Jaguar's head office in the suburb of Whitley. Our XE's powerplant was built at the new engine factory near Wolverhampton and its body was assembled in Solihull, but the research and development happened here. Although the sun is setting on the deserted site's pyramid-like frontage, the company hopes that the car we're driving will herald a new dawn of profitability.

10.10pm Northampton services – 326.7 miles

Returning to our starting point on the M1, we enter our 14th hour. Refuelling lets us calculate a 41.1mpg average – close to the trip computer's 41.5mpg but somewhat disappointing after 326.7 miles of mixed driving that has erred more towards gentle than vigorous. But despite seating bugbears (Williams feels the headrest pushes his bounce forward and I find the backrest does the same to my shoulders), we're both feeling remarkably fresh. The XE's versatile chassis and steering, easy-going engine, slick gearbox and plush, high-tech cabin are manna from heaven for high-mileage drivers.

So, anyone fancy driving to Moscow, Ayrshire? ▲

