

2 Cost considerations

– affordable, or a money pit?



Purchase price

An average X300/308 costs the same as a used family car or newer small car. They are, therefore, fantastic value and, because of their size, are very safe. These are probably the best value Jaguars, with only the XJ40 being cheaper (but poorer value). As usual it's wise to buy the best you can afford, especially for main dealer history and lowish mileage. Apart from occasional trade-ins by loyal customers, the X300/X308s are no longer in official Jaguar dealers, though it's still worth asking if they know of any excellent cars locally. Most good cars are with independent Jaguar specialists, so scanning motor magazines will soon reveal which dealers concentrate on the type and price of car you require. Top dealers carry the best cars but at a price.



Make every trip a pleasure.

Jaguar club or specialist classic magazines (or web sites) are another source of good cars from knowledgeable sellers. Private sales vary from those asking foolishly high prices to realistic sellers wishing to dispose of a car that has served them well. To buy a good car privately this book or a knowledgeable friend will be useful to help avoid bad examples.

Affordable to run?

For X300/308s intended for regular use it is important to include fuel, servicing, consumables and insurance costs when deciding whether the car will be affordable. Modern cars depreciate but have low running costs and X300/308s are generally the opposite, apart from post 2000 V8s or rare sports, or special edition models which will still fall in value as their age and mileage



Angle hose to fill up faster.

changed. Check records carefully and examine fluid level and colour. Apart from fluid checks when hot it is mostly only possible to check for smooth gear selection and listen for excessive whine or knocks on hard acceleration, harsh shifting, slipping clutches or to/fro clunking of loose mountings.

The strong differential is normally good even if seals need replacing but the rubber Jurid propshaft coupling can crack and split. If the output shafts are loose this will be obvious by pulling-pushing the top of the rear wheels even without jacking the car up. The suspension's many rubber/foam bushings will eventually wear and lead to knocking noises over bumps.

The brakes are sturdy and dependable unless the hand brake has been left on (which burns the shoes). In salt road areas, suspect sticking pins or caliper pistons if the brakes pull unevenly. Cars with CATS suspension should ride differently under fast or slow conditions. Apart from track rod ends on sixes and twelves and front wheel bearings, most suspension repairs need some expertise or special tools to fix.

Instruments and electrics

The electrics and instruments are reliable, but are complex and potentially expensive to fix so check them by working methodically through all the car's systems and controls. The full engine management systems controlling fuel and ignition and faults are monitored via on-board diagnostics and many problems are due to loose connections, such as the ABS pump or earth studs on the bulkhead or chassis. The left-hand rear ABS wheel sensor can affect the ABS and traction control. The mirror adjustment switch can break and windows or electric roof become sluggish, but other parts are durable.



Early lamp modules can fail.

Interiors

The interiors are very hardwearing, whether leather or sports fabric. The door panels come loose if not properly refitted after working behind them, and the driver's seat frame can break or the bolster deteriorate, as does the driver's side of the console armrest. Most of the rest should be excellent. Headlinings can sag on early cars and veneer crack or lift but both are much rarer than previous Jaguars. Check for musty smells from water leaks and sickly sweet smells from leaked coolant or hydraulic fluids.



Tough but neglected interior.

9 Serious evaluation

– 60 minutes for years of enjoyment



So, you've narrowed it down to a full inspection candidate to decide on purchase and price. Tick the appropriate box for each check and total the points. Be realistic where bodywork is concerned and vigilant for V8 engine faults.

Overall stance

Ex 4 Gd 3 Av 2 Po 1

All the late XJs should sit flat or slightly tail-high, especially with an empty boot and low fuel load (check the gauge). The distance from the ground to the centre of each wheelarch should be around 27in/660mm and anything much below 26in/635mm indicates sagging suspension, depending on tyre profile (60 series versus 55 on 16in wheels). The XJRs and Sport models sit slightly lower all round and the heavy V12 is often sagging by now, sometimes at both ends, making it level, but low. The car should sit level when viewed from front or back.



Shawn Amershek's dead level car.

Bodywork panels

Ex 4 Gd 3 Av 2 Po 1

Good X300/308s have undistorted panels with even shut lines and few or no car park dents. Look for even gaps between bumpers and body and that the ends line up with the wheelarches. Bumper mounts can corrode and the covers drop off entirely. Look for bubbling halfway along the bottom edge of the rear wing where the hanger attaches. Even slight warping on X300

Reflections help assess panel lines.



Sunroof

Ex 4 Gd 3 Av 2 Po 1

Check for rust around the sunroof opening, either at the edges or for spidery rust spreading under the paint from stonechips. Check the roof opens smoothly without juddering and closes correctly. Look for light fresh grease rather than hard stiff caked material. Headliner stains suggest blocked drains or a poor seal, which can be covered in moss and break up.

Paint

Ex 4 Gd 3 Av 2 Po 1

Metallic paints are most common and not the hardest formula. Consequently there are normally stonechips around the grille, headlights and leading edges of all wheelarch flares. For darker colours these are more obvious since the undercoat is a pale colour, but in all cases look for signs of rust beginning and previous touch-up work. The X300/308 was a valuable car, so expect signs of careful paint touch up and possibly panel re-sprays - not necessarily for accident damage but to revive the finish on a quality car. Look for spray work around the wheelarches, filler flap and screen base. Check for overspray inside wheelarches or on rubber aperture seals and cable sheaths into doors. Look for poor finish inside the fuel filler and the tops of the inner wings. See Chapter 14.



Soft paint stonechips easily.

Lights & body trim

Ex 4 Gd 3 Av 2 Po 1

The X300 had twin-bulb front turn signals and twin rear lamps. Both reverted to single lamps on X308. Check the headlamp glasses for stone chips or sand blasting from high mileage road debris. Greyish deposits inside can sometimes be cleaned from inside with alcohol swabs but the X308 'jewel' headlamps should be bright and clear. Front fog lamps are often damaged so check they work. Various earth studs are used by the lights and indicators so see all lamps work correctly and if more than one is out it may be an earth problem. The lights are controlled by expensive lamp modules so failures should be treated with caution, whether the bulb fail warning light is on or off.



Even plastic chrome can flake.

The long bright trims on each bumper are easy to bend with parking contact and short V8 ones can split as they are chromed plastic, not stainless. Even if trims and bumper seem intact, look underneath to see if they're secured to the beam firmly as beams may split or bend.



Corroded mounts let bumper hang.

Is the body colour rubbing strip securely

13 Do you really want to restore?

– it'll take longer and cost more than you think



X300/308 cars are not old enough to require wholesale restoration in the usual sense of the word. They are also sufficiently plentiful that there is no need to buy a poor car to save money, since good cars are not too expensive.

Therefore there is no classic 'restoration' to be done, but the equivalent would be refurbishing or recommissioning a car which has either been stolen, damaged or left off the road for a period. As always, it is normally easier, cheaper and quicker to search out a good example than to try and rectify significant faults on a poor car. Having said that, if there is a specific car, such as a manual XJR or an otherwise excellent V8 that has been sidelined with cam chain or Nikasil trouble, it can make some kind of sense to put the car back into action rather than break it for spare parts. Such a car should come very cheap, to account for the money that will need to be spent.

Setting out to repair a car that is already in need of major work is certainly not cost-effective and unlikely to be especially satisfying either, unless you obtain the car for very little, or mainly want to learn your way around Jaguars. New body shells are available but there is a huge amount of work involved in re-shelling a car which is much more focused on today's complex wiring circuitry than it is with old classics and simple technology.

Repairing or even diagnosing faults in an X300/308 is nothing like repairing a simple older car, as there are lots of electronic components and circuits which can't be checked – much less repaired – without specialist knowledge and some equipment. This puts them in a different class to simpler cars from an earlier era, which are never likely to disappoint an owner due to spiralling costs or complexity of repair. If you have never restored a car before, you should start with a simple, smaller model.

Even if you already have a poor car, or have decided to buy one in need of work, ask yourself whether it makes sense. The author purchased possibly the most corroded X300 in the UK, but this was justified, because it is not only a very early car but a very rare manual XJR model, and likely to provide unmatched fun in the long term. For your dream V12 or Daimler Super V8 you may consider doing



Can you repair air conditioning?



Damage is more than skin deep.