

SAFE SPEED

*All in the name of safety,
we unleash Jaguar's 364kW
supercharged F-type V8 S
on the terrific roads of
Targa Adelaide*

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PERFECT PRINTS



THE SIREN STARTS to howl barely a second after the rear tyres give up traction, their squealing protests harmonising with the wailing alarm as a camera flash illuminates the dark suburban street. On a normal day, this chain of events would cause the blood to run cold in a driver's veins. But not today.

The siren is ours, and the strobes of flashing light come from the camera-ready rally spectators who line the temporary street circuit in the heart of the Adelaide CBD. Like cutting the proverbial red ribbon, the scarlet F-type V8 S slashes through the ceremonial start line, the brutal burble announcing the official start of the Targa Adelaide tarmac rally.

In the tradition of the Targa Florio, Mille Miglia and Tour de Corse, Targa Adelaide offers teams of drivers and navigators the chance to drive as fast as physics allow on the twisting tarmac roads that snake around South Australia's capital city.

For one night and the following four days, one hundred competition cars ranging from classic metal to modern supercars will circumnavigate the city fringe: the 1000km course is broken into 28 Special Stages that range from short 5km blasts to the 15km descent through the volcanic Gorge Road.

At the head of the field is this F-type in the official role of 'OA', backed up by a Smurf-blood blue XFR-S as the tail-chasing 'OB'. The first car through each closed-road rally stage, the F-type's wailing sirens and eight supercharged

cylinders will alert the local residents – both human and animal – that the rally field is right on our heels. To keep them there, we must drive as fast as we dare. Helmeted, suited and exempt from speed limits, OA is the most envied role in the rally, made more so by this year's donated vehicle. But we are also a sacrificial lamb; the first toe to test the water on each new stage. And water, well, there's plenty of that.

Murphy's Law is in full force, as the combination of 364kW, rear-wheel drive and a soft top virtually guarantees that it will rain. The skies are already starting to weep as

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co-driver Simone Bachmann and I arrive at the opening night of the rally; the Prologue night stage at the Wayville Showground.

This fast blast around the narrow city-street circuit is our first chance to sample Jaguar's highly anticipated performance roadster, and it is far from an ideal test bed. The narrow lanes of the Showground are full of puddles and slick pavers; the laneways just wide enough for the single horse-drawn buggies that still use them during festival season. We have 488 horses to

fit through the lanes, and no margin for error – Murphy also states that, when people are watching, there's a chance of your antics going viral on YouTube for all the wrong reasons.

Extreme caution is exercised on our first foray into the stage. Every traction and damper device set to full restraint – only the active exhaust is flicked on for extra burble, and competes with the siren for decibel dominance.

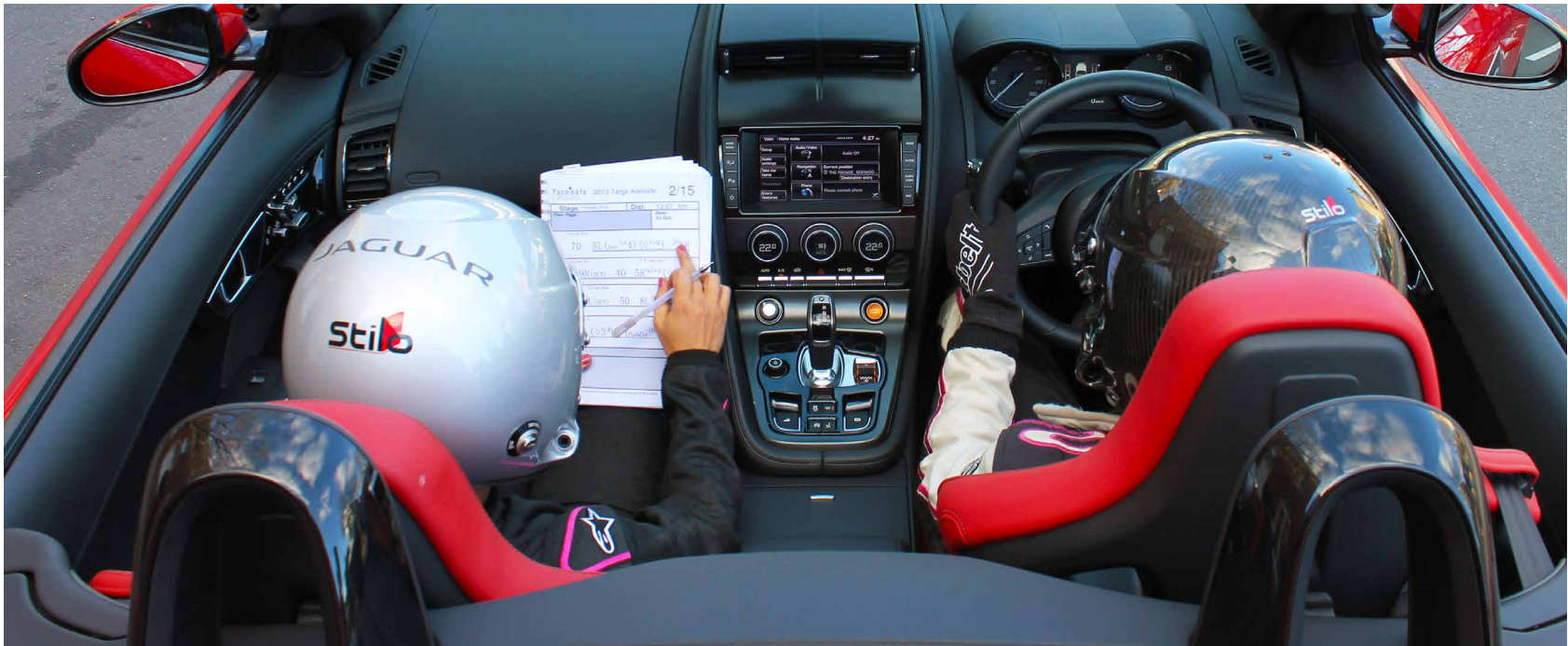
Traction is hard to come by in such sloppy conditions, particularly with a mountainous 625Nm and only two wheels to transmit it to the ground. But in the higher gears on the straights, free from the heavy shackles of the electronic aids, the familiar Jaguar/Land Rover 5.0-litre V8 engine's power is generously, if deliberately, meted out.

The linear supercharger offers full torque from just 2500rpm, then calmly hands the baton to the powerband after 5500rpm and runs to a 6500rpm redline. There is no supercar-esque hit of propulsion or heart-in-mouth rabid acceleration, just a smoothly piled-on power delivery that is deceptively quick, particularly on the straighter stretches.

The F-type feels more than capable of its claimed 0-100km/h time of 4.3 seconds and (limited) top speed of 300km/h. With a full 41kW less, it may seem at a disadvantage next to the similarly engined XKR-S Cabrio, but its more diminutive dimensions and all-aluminium construction sees power-to-weight tip in at 218kW/tonne versus the XKR-S's 226kW/tonne. The room for more breath in the engine points to some deeply moving potential in the inevitable future R/RS variants. Right



Above right: OA car must run the course at full pace. Sam obliged. Right: carbonfibre spokes on 20-inch alloys are an \$8500 option



Targa Adelaide

Right: with trees lining the road, there are plenty of opportunities to get things wrong. Far right: 364kW, 625Nm, traction control off...



now, 364kW is quite enough, thank you Jaguar.

As the night stretches on, the rain eases and a drying line from hundreds of hot semi-slicks begins to appear. The Zero cars must clear the track after every category on the night stage, and are sent out repeatedly with sirens wailing (cue tiny violins). We use the opportunity to flip switches and alternate gear modes to see which combination works best.

The edgier Trac DSC chassis setting with manual shifts in Sport mode is the most predictable pairing. The Trac DSC instantly sharpens the steering, suspension and throttle responses, quickens the gearbox, and loosens the stability control's vice-like hold. This also sets up the Dynamic Launch Control (exclusive to the S models) firing the car forward without lighting up the dash like a disco ball.

The 20-inch 'Blade' forged alloys, complete with carbonfibre spoke inserts (an \$8,500 option), communicate every bump and lump, though the ride does not fall to the crashy side

of firm. If anything, the ride is more noticeably firm in the default suspension setting at road speed, exemplified by Simone as she balances morning lattes and helmets while we weave through traffic towards the first day's stages.

Comfort is compromised by the bulky helmets, nav bags, intercoms and other rally paraphernalia. Without it, the clean if slightly conventional cabin would be a sublime seat to take in the vineyard vistas.

Arriving at the first stage, we helmet up and agree to stay that way on the shorter liaisons between stages – we will look like total dorks, but it is simply easier than Simone juggling helmets and road books on her lap.

Lights, siren, launch, and the rally proper is underway. The trees of the Upper Hermitage stage bend quickly out of peripheral vision, seeming to cower from the noise. The exhaust note is simply orchestral, rising urgently through the rev range and then thumping down a few octaves on the upshift, accompanied by

that fantastic firework crackle on overrun that bounces off the shale and sandstone cuttings. Heavy braking reverses the soundtrack, with huge blips of the throttle followed by spiralling revs that even our helmet's thick earmuffs cannot dampen.

And damp it is. Stages such as Chain of Ponds are exactly that, with rivers of water slashing its smooth surface. The course checkers before us have left a list of road warnings on the start line's alert board, and we hastily jot the distances down before tearing away to verify their location. This is one of the main reasons for a Zero Car – to check the course at speed. Oil patches the course checkers may miss at 60km/h will be more than obvious under hard braking at a hundred; a stream of water that may part for a slower tyre could send quicker cars aquaplaning off into the olive groves.

We locate most of the standing water, but one has eluded the course checkers and, typically, we hit it on powerdown around a blind

crested corner. The rear end comes half-way around before the electronics and panicked braking thankfully catch the spin; the F-type's quickened rack-and-pinion steering sharply pulling the nose away from the sandstone walls. We radio the additional danger point to the start control and dawdle through the rest of the stage, our once full-noise orchestra downgraded to a pipe band.

And so the slow march continues, carefully, until the skies finally stop sobbing just in time for day four's infamous Gorge Road stage.

This first sample of genuine grip reveals a different beast. Driven by the rear, but not dominated by it, the F-type sashays from left to right through the cambered twists, the throttle steering and propelling all at once.

The delivery of power through the smooth ZF eight-speed automatic is nothing short of sublime. Whether in full auto, Sport or Manual mode, the eight-speeder changes with no hint of driveline shock or hesitation.

The progression to intentional oversteer is not as predictable in the dry, a result of the trick e-diff in the V8 S, and the odd attempt to slide into second-gear corners is often foiled as torque is diverted to the wheel with the most traction. But powerdown is explosive, the diff hooking up and slinging the car out of corners, much to the delight of the gathering crowds who, like the sun, finally emerge as we make our final passes at full noise through the suburban landscape.

And yet, our mood turns dark and stormy. Stripping off sirens and stickers, and shoehorning helmets into the boot, we prepare to hand back the lovely roadster. The F-type seems about as enthusiastic as we are; the stop-start eco-mode switches off the engine at the traffic lights on our way to the garage, and the silence that follows is deafening. As abhorrent as the sound normally is, and as annoying as it was on loop over four days and one night, all we want now is to hear the wail of a siren. ☒

JAGUAR F-TYPE V8 S

Engine 5000cc V8, dohc, 32v, supercharged
Power 364kW @ 6500rpm
Torque 625Nm @ 2500–5500rpm
Transmission Eight-speed automatic
Front suspension double wishbones, coil springs, adaptive dampers, anti-roll bar
Rear suspension double wishbones, coil springs, adaptive dampers, anti-roll bar
Brakes ventilated discs 380mm front, 376mm rear, ABS, EBD
Wheels 20x9-inch front, 20 x 10.5-inch rear
Tyres 255/35R20 front, 295/30R20 rear
Weight (kerb) 1665kg
Power-to-weight 218kW/tonne
0-100km/h 4.3sec (claimed)
Top speed 300km/h (limited)
Basic price \$201,945
On sale Now

evo rating: ★★★★★