

JAGUAR F-PACE



A SUNSET DRIVE IN THE CAPE WINELAND MOUNTAINS

If there's one type of car that represents our current period in motoring history, it's the SUV – and now Jaguar has cut in on the action and finally brought us their first ever SUV. It may be more than a decade after BMW, Porsche and Audi, but who cares – SUV sales continue to go through the roof.

As you drive towards Franschhoek on the R45, the road eventually becomes the main thoroughfare that runs through the village, Huguenot Road, named after the village's French settlers. At the end of Huguenot Road is a T-Junction where you turn left onto Lambrecht Road (still classified as the R45). The long sweeping bends scoop up the winding mountain road known as the Franschhoek Pass and links the village of Franschhoek to the town of Villiersdorp, on the other side of the mountain.

The complex route of twists and turns up the Franschhoek Pass is not for the faint of heart. As you ascend, each bend in the road delivers a spectacular view more breathtaking than previous.

Showing the F-PACE S around Franschhoek Pass I find Jaguar designers have brilliantly merged the high-riding driving position and four-wheel drive (with some decent off-road ability), to an eight-speed automatic gearbox and a 3.0-litre V6 380hp supercharged muscle engine. It's unobtrusively smooth and effortlessly powerful. >>







You may initially be tempted to play with the paddles but it's best left to deciding for itself what ratio to pick as the gearbox mapping is spot on and makes for fingertip light steering. Drive a little below the F-PACE's limits, keeping the steering and throttle inputs smooth, and it displays more agility than its Land Rover relatives.

Finding a few wet patches on the mountain pass the full-time four-wheel-drive system kicks in. At the first sign of wheel slip 50 percent of the power is sent to the front wheels – a process that happens in milliseconds.

Check the local weather report for the daily sunset time and estimate the sun sets behind Franschhoek mountains about 20 minutes earlier than the official sunset time. There are several small gravel clearings on the Franschhoek side of the road where you can pull over to take photos from an elevation that will make you feel as if you're in a helicopter hovering over the valley. Take a picnic basket and enjoy the sunlight filtering through the ever-changing clouds, creating a patchwork quilt over the vineyards.

When stepping back into the F-PACE take note of the ergonomical driving position, it's set to 'Sports Command' with hugely comfy seats. You'd have to drive hundreds of miles to feel the remotest bit fatigued.

As the F-PACE is kitted out with just about everything as standard, the optional extras menu is small. But one that is an interesting feature is the Activity Key which allows you to lock or unlock the car using a wearable

Another mountain pass worth a drive

On the other side of Franschhoek is one of the oldest mountain passes in the Cape - Helshoogte or 'Hell's Heights' (also known as the R310). The climb is steep and the views from the top impressive. Helshoogte links the wine districts of Stellenbosch and Franschhoek and passes through the little villages of Kylemore, Johannesdal and Pniel - which was initially established as a mission settlement in the 1800s and is filled with quaint houses, an ancient church and oak tree lined streets.


Restaurants with a view

Near the top of the Helshoogte Pass is Tokara Wine Estate which has a restaurant worth mentioning not just for the menu (lots of regional game) but also their spectacular views. The R45 up the Franschhoek Pass will take you past two world-rated French restaurants and wineries. Haute Cabriere comes up first on your left and then Le Petite Ferme on your right. www.franschhoek.org.za

waterproof wristband, meaning you can leave your conventional key tucked away in the car while you go about your assorted lifestyle activities. Simply touch the Activity Key onto the Jaguar badge on the boot lid and the car unlocks.

Although it has lightweight aluminium architecture, you won't be chucking the F-PACE about like a hot-hatch, but then that's the wrong criteria to be judging it against. Ultimately, it's not as hyper as a Macan, but Jaguar knows that engineering the F-PACE to out-handle the Porsche on a racetrack is a futile exercise. What they have fixed on instead is what customers want – comfort, space and something brisk to drive around in. As such they've designed an SUV that's fun to drive, fast but not manically so, tall enough to peer over traffic and just about tough enough to deal with some light off-road excursions – not Arctic expeditions. It's spacious, too, and – something I haven't mentioned yet, but perhaps the most important point of all – it's good to look at. It's more of an F-TYPE on stilts than a full-blown SUV, complete with a dynamic silhouette and low roofline. For me, it's the best-looking SUV out there.

If this doesn't become Jaguar's best-selling model ever, I'll be stunned. It's a bold and different direction for Jaguar, who have made a splash about entering the SUV market; and it's been well worth the wait.

For sheer sports performance, choose between a 3.0-litre V6 Turbocharged Diesel or a 3.0 litre V6 Supercharged Petrol engine. Price from £52,300. 

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www.jaguar.co.uk. Written by Cindy-Lou Dale

