



There's no doubt the Lambo is of Italian descent

tant to savor the moment.

Normally, racetrack laps in a Lamborghini Diablo would make anyone's day, but our perception was skewed by having just driven the Jaguar XJR-15. By contrast, the Diablo seemed almost ordinary and certainly a little idiosyncratic. The 5.7-liter Italian V-12 also makes wonderful engine music, but of an entirely different nature. Since the car is EPA legal, there's little exhaust noise, but the engine breathes through intake openings just behind the B-pillar close to the driver's left ear. Full-throttle work produces a multifaceted moaning sound as air is sucked into the big engine. As engine speed rises, so does the sound level, until it drowns out all rational thought near the 7000-rpm redline. Wonder how long it'll be before the EPA becomes concerned about intake noise?

The ergonomics of the Diablo are much improved over the Countach's. There's actually enough room to sit up straight without banging into the headliner, and although the steering wheel blocks part of the instrument cluster, the tach and speedo are front-and-center legible. My biggest gripe is with the narrow space for the driver's throttle foot between the brake pedal and central tunnel—I had to remove my shoe to operate the throttle.



bolical to get moving from a dead stop. Their engines are tuned to make power at such high rpm that at low speeds, they cough and stumble and make almost zero torque. Not so the Jag—the smooth V-12 pulled cleanly away, nearly as docile as a street car.

On the track, the XJR-15 is truly a wonderful ride, the perfect compromise between racing and street. You can say the savage edge of a pure race car has been softened slightly, or conversely, that it's the best-handling street car you can imagine. Being 100-percent composite, it's so light that every aspect of performance is enhanced. Relatively low spring and roll rates are enough to keep it stable in pitch and roll, as well as deliver a high level of ride compliance. The brakes are phenomenal and the acceleration fierce. And always there's that V-12, a medley of mechanical noises superimposed over the raucous rise and fall of the exhaust sound.

The Jag had just arrived from Europe—on rain tires—and the race rubber hadn't yet shown up. In short order, the left front tire was history, but even without the race tires, the handling dynamics were outstanding. The XJR-15 goes exactly where you ask it, with cornering force directly proportional to steering input. Cornering balance is a slight understeer on trailing throttle, with a predictable transition to neutral as the power comes on. The gearing was ideal for Willow Springs; the Jag engine reaching 6000 rpm in sixth gear just at the end of the long pit straightaway. In deference to the tires, I eventually pulled off the track.

Before surrendering this truly "super" car, I remained in the cockpit for a minute with the door closed, just listening to the clicks and pops as the XJR-15 cooled. It had been an incomparable experience, and it seemed impor-

The Diablo's handling is brutal. Lots of steering force, lots of oversteer, and lots of adrenaline. The big Pirelli tires produce some awesome cornering power, but the Diablo never seems completely comfortable with the whole process of hard cornering. It's best at hard, straight acceleration, where it quickly goes 100 mph while sounding like 200. Its high final-drive ratio and good torque characteristics demand little shifting, which is good because the gate requires concentration and determination.

Our instrumented test data was affected by two factors, rain tires on the Jag and the boss owning the Diablo. The rain tires hampered the XJR-15 in both acceleration and skidpad. We expected it to generate at least 1.5 g with race tires and chop at least a half second off its 0-60 time. Similarly, we didn't hammer the last tenth of a second out of the Diablo's performance. After all, how would you explain to the owner of the company that you had just hand-grenaded his quarter-million dollar car? Even so, the performance of both cars hint at their potential.

These two supercars have many similarities. They're both mid-engined with longitudinal V-12s, both cabin-forward layouts, both rear drive, and both exceedingly rare. They differ radically in other ways. The Jag uses the most innovative possible construction for chassis and body, the Diablo gets by with steel tubing. The Jag was conceived as a pure competition car and adapted to a quasi-street vehicle, while the Diablo has been detoxed to meet all U.S. requirements.

Which is the best? If you can afford either, price obviously isn't a concern. Owning the XJR-15 in the U.S. is a moot point anyway, but in the abstract, consider this: The Diablo is the ultimate in street image, the XJR the ultimate in street performance. Either way, you can't lose. **MT**