

# Test Drive

## 2010 JENSEN INTERCEPTOR S

The Jensen Interceptor has recently been reborn and revitalised for the 21st century and CCB borrowed one to see how this 'new' version shapes up. **Peter Simpson** pushes the Jensen's buttons

**B**elieve it or not, you're looking at a brand new Jensen Interceptor. Well, sort of. While on its glossy surface, this car looks every inch the stylish big glasshouse grand tourer of old, and those silver-on-black numberplates point to a car put together in 1972, all is far from what it seems.

You've probably seen a little bit lately about the re-launch of the Jensen Interceptor, that great, gulping Sixties and Seventies monster of the highways reborn for the 21st century, using original cars completely rebuilt with new engines, suspension and interior tweaks. Even Jeremy Clarkson on *Top Gear* managed to be impressed and nice about it – although he has yet to sample one, apparently. Well, Jezza, read on because this is what you're missing. CCB has pushed in ahead of you.

But first the history bit, for the Interceptor is one of the great survivors of the classic world. Despite dying on the operating table a few times, it's been revived by a number of different surgeons. Its birth came in 1966, when specialist British manufacturer Jensen superseded its glassfibre CV8 model with something a little more serious. Glassfibre construction was swapped for steel, and home-grown styling substituted for a thoroughly contemporary design by Touring of Milan, adding another name to its roll of honour that already included Ferrari, Alfa Romeo and Aston Martin. Early bodies were built by Vignale in Turin, before Jensen took over and shifted production to marginally less exotic West Bromwich. Handsome and imposing, albeit perhaps overly influenced by the little-known and unsuccessful Brasinca



Uirapuru GT from Brazil, the Interceptor's most distinctive features were its huge wraparound rear glass tailgate... plus its phenomenal performance and thirst. The latter two attributes came courtesy of its massive Chrysler V8 engine of 6276cc, which later rose to an eye-watering, and wallet-shredding 7212cc. However, in 1976, in an energy crisis-gripped world where sub-teen fuel consumption was a little too scary even for the rich, Jensen ceased trading, and the Interceptor was no more. The defibrillators kicked in for the first time in 1984, when manufacture was restarted by a new owner, but this

renaissance lasted only until 1991. So the model lay dormant again until a few years back, when a further incarnation, the Interceptor S, came along. These cars are now being completed by newly-established Jensen International Automotive, alongside its own, improved, Interceptor R version.

### NEW KID JENSEN ON THE BLOCK

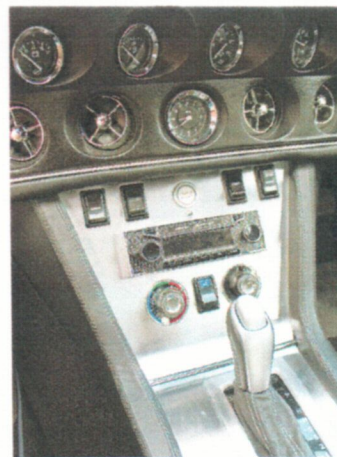
Our car is actually an S model, albeit featuring all the nips, tucks and collagen injections that the R will also have. For

those who like their looks old school, the new kid Jensen on the block has thankfully managed to steer clear of trying to update what was always a timelessly elegant design to begin with. A deeper front valance sports a mesh grille designed to gulp more fresh air towards the radiator (original Interceptors were never ones for keeping their cool that easily) and there are slimmer, modern indicator units alongside. But elsewhere, there's still chrome where chrome should properly be. And even the larger 17in alloy wheels emulate those fitted on past generations. Even the colour on this one harks back to the Seventies; it's a Lamborghini shade called Lavenda. No prizes for guessing what that means in English.

Chrysler has been usurped by Chevrolet under the bonnet, with a General Motors LS3 V8 shoehorned in. That sounds less impressive than saying it's the same engine that the current Corvette uses, a 6.2-litre unit offering, on this particular example, an utterly mad 480bhp, with a top speed in excess of 160mph and a 0-60 time of 4.5 seconds. Helping to channel all this brute force is a GM four-speed electronic automatic transmission, while doing their best to try and keep any inexperienced new driver on the road and out of trouble are a heavily revised suspension (including a limited-slip differential and Jaguar independent rear set-up in place of the old occasionally dicey live rear axle) and high-spec disc brakes. In short, Jensen on top, Chevy-powered Jag underneath. Sort of. Opening the wide driver's door is like



Interior is a neat combination of old and new, with traditional switchgear and modern touches like sat nav.





Out goes the Chrysler V8, replaced by GM's 6.2-litre offering from the Corvette - it's good for 480bhp.

entering one of those old buildings that has been refurbished for a new purpose in life, a London docklands warehouse given a makeover for modern living. The previous fabric remains; there's that distinctive slab of plastic dashboard, its supplementary centre gauges angled towards the driver as if in collusion against nosy passengers. Switches are traditional chunky and, on this car, there's a drilled Moto-Lita steering wheel matching the black leather upholstery and polished aluminium-finished centre console. It's when you look closer that the 21st century starts to come out of hiding. Least subtle are the modern gear selector knob and the mid-mounted 'engine start' button that glows blue when the ignition comes on. More discreet, immediately below that, is the retro-looking Becker Mexico entertainment system concealing CD and satellite navigation options, plus the speedometer with a digital odometer on its otherwise old-fashioned face.

### A COUGH THEN ALL HELL BREAKS LOOSE

The ignition key barrel on the steering wheel has been blanked off, the new one is...well, we could tell you, but then we'd have to kill you. It's concealed for security reasons. Besides, the key merely reads the Interceptor for action, it's that small translucent blue button that pokes it into life. Press it, and there's the merest of coughs before all hell seems to break loose around you. The car shakes as the engine fires, then the vibration is replaced by the muted grumble of the twin exhausts. It's impossible to resist blipping the throttle and being answered by the gorgeous deep, rich timbre of a muscular American V8 in fine fettle. So you do it once, twice, again and again. It's quite entertaining playing musical Interceptors and making the car gently rock and roar.

Much, much more entertaining though, is slipping the gear selector into drive. We won't revert to the clichés yet about unleashing this beast, because this is a car where you can only come close to exploiting some of its potential well away

from the urban jungle. Moving through town, this torquey Interceptor is docile and compliant, albeit the transmission on this one did hunt a bit, as if disgruntled at not being allowed to run away properly. It's a large car from outside, but it seems less so inside, the snug-fitting cabin (it's a four-seater in theory, but the rear ones are of that type that puts off anybody wanting to keep circulation in their legs) enveloping you, while the power steering makes it easy to guide around bends, even at low speeds. Visibility is excellent, the panoramic front and rear windows meaning there are few blind spots. In fact, dial in how big that boot is, and this could be a very practical town and shopping car.

Except it isn't, of course. The Interceptor is a car for long, high speed trips on wide, sweeping roads, and once the opportunity presents itself, we push the accelerator hard to see what 480 horses all at once feels like. The words 'unleashed' and 'beast' now fall much more easily to mind, as the Jensen hunkers down at the rear and then launches itself like a rocket towards the horizon with a pace that genuinely pins anybody inside back in their seats. Acceleration is - well, awe inspiring really, the sense of drama heightened by the deep guttural growl of the V8. But amid the exhilaration comes the surprise (at least to anybody used to original Interceptors) of how planted, even safe the car feels. There's no scrabbling for grip or wayward snaking from the back end as kickdown

takes full effect, and the speedo needle surges upwards. It is mere seconds before the legal limit is reached, at which point the brakes, with AP Racing six-piston ones up front, prove their effectiveness. Cruising around 60 to 70mph, the Jensen is hardly stretched at all, and corners do little to disturb it, with much less body roll than we remember from its predecessors.

The overall impression is of a machine more nimble and definitely much faster than its half-a-century-old looks might suggest. It's a sophisticated recreation, but one that doesn't allow electronics and too much 21st century sanity to get in the way of sheer driver engagement and enjoyment. When Jeremy Clarkson finally gets to try one of these, he's probably going to quite like it. If nothing else, he'll be able to yell "Power!" an awful lot.



### I WANT ONE, BUT...

...I really can't afford it. With a price tag starting at £105,000, the 'new' Interceptor is an exclusive luxury, hand-built in limited numbers and with each car taking around five months to complete. If you want your Jensen kick more immediately and for less money, then original Interceptors come somewhat cheaper, although values did rise quite steeply last year. The very best of the standard coupés are realising around £25,000 nowadays. Buy from a dealer or seek out the very best you can find and that's reasonably what you can expect to spend; a recent advert on CCB's associated [www.carandclassic.co.uk](http://www.carandclassic.co.uk) website listed a 1975 model, described as immaculate, first class and driving beautifully, for £25,995.

The even more potent and ultra desirable 390bhp SP models, of which just 232 were constructed, can demand around £2000 extra again. Moving down the food chain a bit, between £7000 and £10,000 should be enough to grab you something in reasonable order, while if you fancy a challenge, you could try investing in a rolling restoration project, picked up and probably trailered away for about three grand. Be warned though, choose this option and you'll be spending a lot on specialists and parts, unless you're handy enough to do a lot of the work yourself.

Sixties and Seventies Interceptors still offer astounding performance, albeit with a more rough and ready driving experience, as you'd expect from something utilising engineering that's 40 to 50 years old. Driving one feels very similar to an Aston Martin V8 though, something the Interceptor shares more than a passing resemblance to as well. Rust and thirst are big drawbacks however. All-steel construction means corrosion can strike anywhere and everywhere, while fuel consumption will only reach the mid- to high-teens if you're using the car in a fashion that is, frankly, boring. Drive it properly and openly weep as the petrol gauge's needle drops just as quickly as the speedometer rises...

### CONTACT

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It may be a grand tourer, but the tweaked suspension means that this Interceptor handles like a sports car.

### SPECIFICATION

#### CAR JENSEN INTERCEPTOR S AND R (STANDARD SPEC)

ENGINE SIZE	6162cc V8
POWER	429bhp at 5900rpm
TORQUE	424lb-ft at 4600rpm
TOP SPEED	160mph plus
0-60 MPH	4.5secs
MPG	20mpg plus
GEARBOX	4-spd auto

