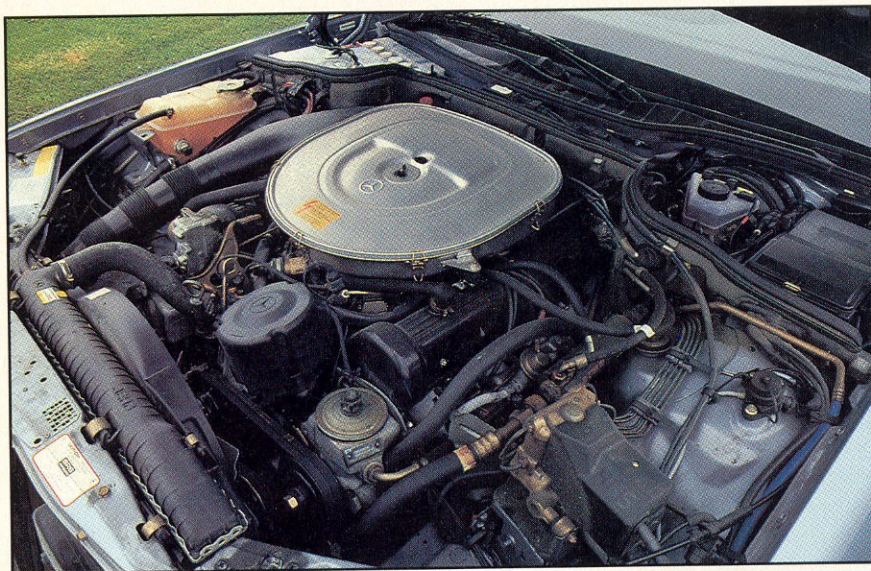


SHOWDOWN



ments for 1990. The 24-valve in-line six has been stroked 10mm for a displacement increase to 4.0 liters. Power is up thirteen percent, torque up twenty percent. The car is quick now, and the engine seems to hurry through the gears—yet the Jaguar still recorded the highest overall fuel economy in the test. As in the BMW, the six-cylinder powerplant gives the Jag a different and altogether earthier flavor than what comes through in the V-8-powered competitors.

The instrument cluster for 1990 is, finally, back to the Jaguar way. Gone are the glowing green electronic gauges, replaced by round dials with needles and numbers, all set into a field of walnut burl. These traditional instruments, arranged in an intimately compartmentalized cockpit, are basic—make that essential—to the Jaguar way.

The Jaguar way is quite different from the ways of other carmakers, not surprising when you remember that Jaguar is a vest-pocket car company: its total annual production of approximately 50,000 cars equals just two-thirds of what Lexus plans to sell in the U.S. *in its first year*. So we are tempted to make excuses when a Jaguar is equipped peculiarly—“How come this car has motorized passive belts instead of an air bag?”—and are then totally amazed by the things the car does well. The ride is an unusually fine combination of road sense and smoothness; brake dive and power squat are superbly disciplined. Overall handling is nicely balanced, but—another Jaguar quirk—the steering is so quick just off-center that you tend to steer too much and then correct. It takes a delicate touch to avoid the twitchies when you try to go fast.

Generally, C/D staffers prefer sedans



MERCEDES-BENZ 420SEL