



# A RANGE OF TALENTS

NOT MANY OF US CAN EXPECT THIS MUCH SPORT IN OUR STOCKINGS, BUT **CLIVE WHITE** TRIES SOMETHING SPECIAL TO MULL OVER AFTER CHRISTMAS LUNCH

**F**ROM A humble post-war stopgap vehicle, intended as little more than a light tractor, Land Rover has developed a rare talent for turning utility into luxury – a workaday tool into an object of desire. Like the boiler suit reinvented as designer jeans, Range Rover has become an aspirational icon – just the thing to dream about after Christmas dinner...

## CABIN COMFORT

Another of Land Rover's talents is producing an interior that somehow manages to combine enough luxury to make you feel special (as you should when paying this much), along with enough chunky styling to remind you that this 'limo' is an

extremely capable offroad 4x4. It looks modern and practical, too. Land Rover makes it look easy, but it must be pretty difficult to come up with the right blend of utilitarian plush – a bit like trying to produce a leather-bound, gold-blocked, limited-edition Haynes manual for oily-fingered mechanics to use in the workshop. So don't wipe your muddy boots on the carpet – OK!

Arguably the most prominent interior feature is the wide centre console, proudly protruding from the fascia, creating a broad (cherry) wood-trimmed barrier between the seats and culminating in a generous lidded cubby. Large, easy-to-assimilate audio and climate controls are brought within easy reach of the driver, as is the

loftily-located gear lever. Being positioned on a lateral plane with the steering wheel makes it very handy, but with the lever having hardly any spring detent I often managed to accidentally knock it across to CommandShift manual when seeking a radio button.

The comfortable sports-bolstered front seats' electronic adjustments make for easy fine 'tuning' for that ideal driving position, assisted by the wheel's tilt and reach – and you get those adjustable armrests that 4x4 makers seem to find obligatory. Back seat passengers can lounge in comfort, too, with plenty of space and legroom that only diminishes noticeably when the front seats travel back to their full extent.

As you waft, loftily, above the hedgerows, the harman/kardon entertainment system provides a rich, deep soundtrack to soothe and enhance your travelling pleasure; full climate control maintains your temperature and eight airbags aid your safety.

## DRIVING DYNAMICS

Another of Land Rover's talents is how it manages to persuade a couple of tons of tall, bulky offroader to string together the bends on a twisty road with almost the poise of a medium saloon car. I'm reluctant to use the word 'agile', but once you've got the hang of it, the Sport almost is.

The large diameter steering wheel tames over-enthusiastic twirling, but from the elevated driving position, corners and obstacles can be anticipated long in advance, enabling the vehicle to be well set up to deal with them. If you find you're going a bit too quickly, four driven wheels gripping with Dynamic Response ensure this substantial car will go round the bend without much drama. If you find yourself going much too quickly, powerful competition-style braking by Brembo (part of the Dynamic Response option) provides impressive retardation.

Suspension has, unsurprisingly, a sporty feel which, along with low-profile tyres, made the ride a little choppy at times. Slalom between potholes or find that all too rare stretch of better-surfaced road, though, and the Sport rewards with a compliant, comfortable ride.

But I'm discussing this car as though it's only a limousine – rough roads are nothing when you're in one of the (if not *the*) most capable offroaders on the planet.

It's so easy, too: Land Rover has done the decision making, called it Terrain Response, and interpreted various offroad scenarios into a series of dial-in options. Just select and go: your choice influences engine, transmission and suspension settings to give you the most effective combination. Chuck in Hill Descent Control and the electronic parking brake's 'auto take-off' facility and no car maker can do much more to assist you.

## PULLING PERFORMANCE

Another of Land Rover's talents is how capable it's made the Range Rover Sport when towing. As the car's wide enough to possibly not need towing mirrors, I fitted ours as much to test their attachment as for practical purposes. Strap-over mirrors needed careful adjustment to fit snugly, but the excellent rearward view from these with the Sport's own mirrors was appreciated.

Removing the rear bumper's discreet blanking plate exposes the detachable towbar's receptor and electrics, for grovel-free coupling preparations. More top marks to Land Rover for a couple of all-too-rare towing features: the usable breakaway-cable attachment (an eye just large enough for the cable's clip to pass through to form a loop);



## VERDICT

Cabin comfort	■ ■ ■ ■ ■
Driving dynamics	■ ■ ■ ■ ■
Pulling performance	■ ■ ■ ■ ■
OVERALL	■ ■ ■ ■ ■

and a proper trailer-repeater graphic in the instrument cluster – no aftermarket accessory lamps here.

There's a potential maximum noseweight of 250kg if the 1710kg rear axle limit isn't exceeded: ideal for heavy horse trailers; otherwise a laden Sport offers 150kg (way beyond most caravan couplings' limit).

The Sport dismissed 1600kg of twin-axle caravan almost as if it didn't exist. Air suspension kept things level and damped out most vertical pitching effects to give a mostly comfortable ride. Cross winds – quite severe at times during the test – were hardly noticed, and neither was aerodynamic displacement from trucks etc. The trailer remained well controlled through the most contorted bends, too.

It took around just 17sec for this weighty outfit to reach 60mph, with 30-50mph taking 6.3sec and 40-60mph 10.2. All

## Technical

List price	£44,545 (otr)
Engine	2720cc, V6-cyl, common-rail turbodiesel. Longitudinal
Power	190bhp (140kW) @ 4000rpm
Torque	325lb ft (440Nm) @ 1900rpm
Transmission	6-speed auto with CommandShift manual selection, low ratio transfer gearbox and Terrain Response. 4WD
CO <sub>2</sub>	271g/km (CO <sub>2</sub> Offset package available)
Fuel/tank	Diesel/19.4gal (84.1ltr)
Fuel consumption	25.5mpg solo/ 19.1mpg towing 1600kg
Range	494 miles solo/ 370 miles towing
Gross vehicle weight	3070kg
Kerbweight	2455kg (85% = 2086kg)
Gross train weight	6570kg
Noseweight limit	150kg (see text)
Towing equipment	LR detachable ball Tow pack £400; height-adjustable ball £287.87; N/S electrics kit £88.12 inc VAT, plus fitting
Spare wheel	Full size S/SE models, temporary spare HSE
Insurance	Group 14E
Range Rover Sport model-range	£35,500 (S) to £58,000 (4.2 V8 Supercharged)



Range Rover

## Shortlist choice

Land Rover Discovery TDV6 HSE £43,450; Volvo XC90 4.4 V8 SE £44,225; Porsche Cayenne S £44,900; Lexus RX 400h SE-L £45,258



## With thanks to

Chichester Caravans, Redhill (tel 01737 768266; or see chichester-caravans.co.uk) for the loan of Towcar Test caravans

credible figures taken in 'D', which it was possible to better in Sport or manual, but only by fractions. The hill climb, holding 5th gear at 60mph, lost just 2mph at the top.

## VERDICT

Yes it's expensive, but the more you appreciate this awesome vehicle's wide-ranging talents and depths of ability, the price starts to look like better value – and plenty of lesser vehicles cost more.

So, maybe a note to Santa (mention the new TDV8) – and put up a bigger stocking next year...

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