



# Working class HERO?

Workhorse or sporting offroader? Clive White dusts off his boiler suit (or is that tracksuit?) to clock-on with Rexton

With thanks to Chichester Caravans, Redhill, for the loan of Towcar Test caravans. Call 01737 768266 or see chichester-caravans.co.uk.

**B**EFORE I read the sales brochure, it hadn't occurred to me that SsangYong might pitch its Rexton into a similar market to Land Rover's Defender. But there, repeated throughout the publication, was the slogan, 'It works for me', accompanied by pictures of the Rexton wallowing in muddy fields surrounded by sheep, transporting a mini-excavator for ditch-digging duties or dragging a livestock trailer across the mountains.

Maybe I'd missed the point. A second flick through the pages revealed a boat, a caravan and a horse trailer being towed – not all at the same time, I hasten to add;

though SsangYong's 3.2-tonne towing boast possibly means it could do all three at once. So this was obviously what the Rexton got up to at weekends.

The 'It works for me' message nagged away at every turn of the page, driving home the Rexton versatility and value message.

## CABIN COMFORT

Despite improvements in Far Eastern vehicles' interior trim, you might still notice that some of the leather-grained plastics are a little more, er... plasticky, or that tapping a rigid moulding may sound a little more hollow than in some more expensive



competitors. In general, though, remarkably little in terms of materials and assembly quality exposes the Rexton as a budget contender.

One irritation in this S-spec Rexton, however, was that on the otherwise nicely styled and easy-to-use fascia, the single-DIN sized audio unit was lodged in the obviously double-DIN aperture. Despite its steering-mounted controls, it looked a bit DIY – rather like someone had just, well, bunged it DIN...

The top Rexton SPR model's audio aperture, though, is adequately occupied by a twin-DIN Kenwood, or similarly-sized sat-nav unit as an option (available on all models).

Seats looked to be rather flat and unyielding, but with fabric upholstery were found to be supportive and grippy enough to retain their occupants during lumpy off-roading exploits.

The SPR's seats have variable heating and electric (with memory) adjustments. Our model's manual adjustment, though, involved a ratchety back-recline mechanism of the sort that encourages you to fit the seat rather than the seat fitting you. But a spot of fidgeting later and the driving position proved reasonably comfortable.

The rear bench-seat split/folds 60:40, but appears to be just that – a flat bench – though in use was quite acceptable for its up-to-three occupants, with adequate space in the roomy cabin.

The S is the entry model but it has enough spec, such as auto climate-control air conditioning, four front airbags, six-speaker audio, three 12V power sockets, all-electric windows and mirrors with powerfold, leather steering wheel and useful cabin storage areas, including a handy overhead sunglasses holder, to make you feel you've bagged a bargain.

## DRIVING DYNAMICS

Rexton's general exterior stance and styling, particularly around its grille and bonnet area, project a kind of subliminal Mercedes-Benz M-Class feel. This, of course, it has every right to do with much of its mechanicals originating from the German company.

Our five-speed manual S had reasonable performance but sounded gruff while accelerating up through the gears. When settled on a lighter throttle, the engine became noticeably quieter and more refined. A fairly substantial gearlever stirs what feels like a fairly substantial transmission, sometimes notchily but mostly smoothly.

Strangely, while at standstill, depressing the clutch (without touching the accelerator) caused engine revs to rise. I'm not sure if this is intended to assist with low-speed manoeuvring – which it can do – or if it's a kind of 'throttle damper' preventing engine revs falling away to aid smooth gear shifting – which it sort of does. Conversely, this feature could

be annoying in stop-start traffic, as it might also be in some delicate off-road situations. Of course, this won't apply to automatic models.

Predominantly rear-wheel drive, 'Torque On Demand' apportioning power to any wheel as grip dictates without driver intervention (SPR has 'Permanent' 4WD) which, along with ESP, Active Rollover Protection and Hill Descent Control, should see Rexton through the most difficult situations. These 'proportional' systems can sometimes allow initial tyre slippage on soggy grass, however.

SUVs are not normally purchased for sports-car handling, so the SsangYong won't disappoint. The usual low-geared steering, body lean in corners and pitching ride over rough roads applies, though that's not to single out the Rexton as being particularly bad – in fact, it compared quite favourably with our recently tested Mercedes ML320.

## PULLING PERFORMANCE

We'll clear up the Rexton's 3.2-tonne towing claim straight away. While I don't dispute its ability to move such a mass, you really wouldn't want to at normal road speeds. For our purposes, 85% of a substantial kerbweight will haul most caravans quite safely.

However, even with SsangYong considering our big twin-axle a 'lightweight', 60mph from rest arrived no sooner than 23 seconds (I nearly swapped the stopwatch for my diary). But numbers don't tell the full story as 30mph was attained briskly enough to not obstruct most other road users – so urban stop-starts and roundabout exits were not too irksome. Intermediate 30-50mph times in 3rd averaged a respectable 7.5 sec.

At motorway speeds the SUV happily rowed along in 5th gear in most conditions, pulling quite steep inclines without protest. It's unusual for a tall 4x4 and large caravan not to feel the effects of crosswinds or other large vehicles but, despite some buffeting, the Rexton controlled these situations well.

Like many large SUVs, Rexton displayed the traits of softish front suspension with firm rear, giving a pitchy ride. Predictably, a twin-axle caravan only exacerbated the effect which, combined with low-geared steering, made bumpy, twisty backroads feel quite involving. However, the good view from the high seating position compensated for this, enabling early anticipation – so a not unpleasant overall towing experience.

## VERDICT

A competent SUV at a bargain price which could work for you. ■



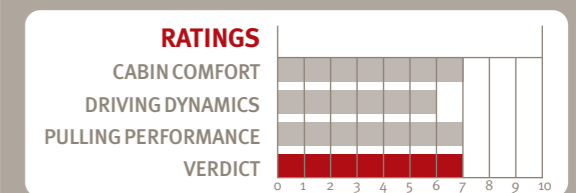
Good luggage space



Nice dash, shame about the DIN DINs

**DID YOU KNOW?**  
The Rexton was first launched in 2001

“The S has enough spec to make you feel you've bagged a bargain”



<b>RRP</b>	£19,995 OTR
<b>Engine</b>	2696cc, in-line 5-cyl, common-rail turbodiesel. Longitudinal
<b>Power</b>	163bhp (122kW) @ 4000rpm
<b>Torque</b>	251lb ft (340Nm) @ 2400rpm
<b>CO<sub>2</sub></b>	228g/km
<b>Transmission</b>	5-speed manual, AWD
<b>Fuel/tank</b>	Diesel/17.6gal (80 litres)
<b>Fuel consumption</b>	29.4mpg solo/18.9mpg towing 1700kg
<b>Range</b>	517 miles solo/332 miles towing
<b>Kerbweight</b>	2088
<b>Gross vehicle weight</b>	22760
<b>Gross train weight</b>	5960
<b>Noseweight limit</b>	128kg
<b>Towing equipment</b>	Bolt-on ball (two height settings) £171.28 (detachable upgrade – £97.85); plug-in wiring kit £83.19; supplementary caravan kit £48.92
<b>Spare wheel</b>	Temporary-use
<b>Insurance</b>	Group 12A
<b>Rexton model-range</b>	£19,995 (S manual) to £24,995 (270 SPR)

Club insurance: 0800 028 4809 • Info: ssangyonggb.co.uk