

MOTOR ⁷⁴MANUAL

JANUARY '79 75c

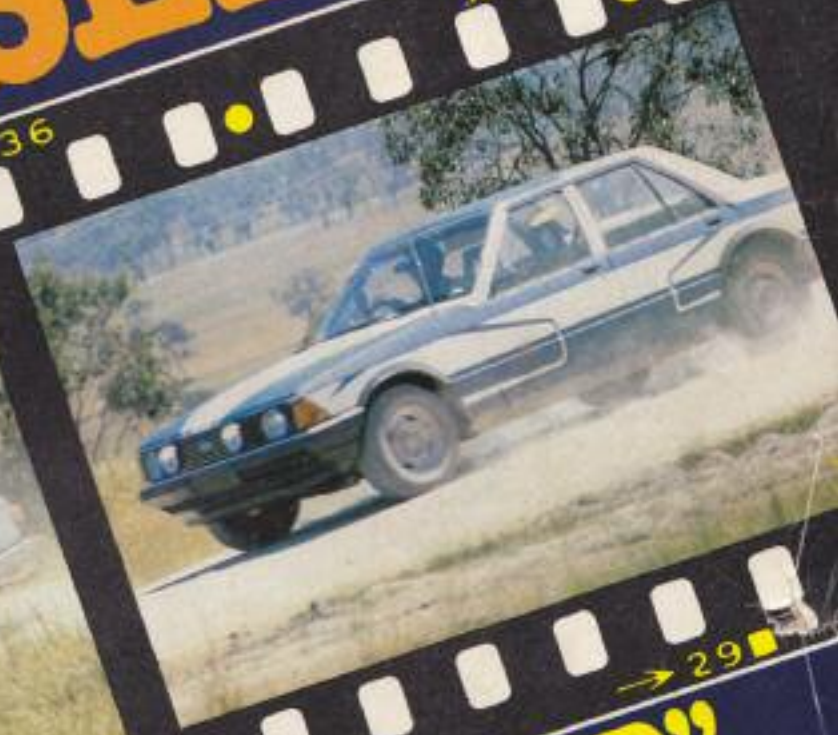
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ROVER SD1
-AT LAST!
RENTAL CARS
how &
how much

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ROVER 3500

Poor man's Jaguar?

It took far too long for the Rover SD1 to arrive in Australia. Now it's here Leyland hopes to sell around 1500 a year. Paul Harrington has the story.



ONCE DUBBED "The poor man's Rolls Royce," Rover products in bygone days always had the reputation for fine quality, but they also had a slightly musty air about them. Though often displaying interesting, innovative features, they never gave the impression of being your true excitement machines.

Of course a great deal has changed over the years. Rover striding out into the "Never never" land with all sorts of experimental ideas, not the least of which was the gas turbine car program. With the introduction of the SD1 Rover 3500, the company has created something which cannot be called musty or ordinary.

It's conventional in most respects, but is still a cut above the norm, and seemingly one of the more inspiring products to come out of the British motor industry in recent years.

Perhaps it can best be described now as "The poor man's Jaguar."

It's only a pity it took so long to reach Oz. A 1.5 million square foot \$160 million factory was built at Solihull especially to manufacture the Rover 3500, using many of the latest production techniques. The car itself was designed by a three man team: Spencer King, David Bache, and John Lloyd. Their efforts were directed at making the car as simple, as safe and as economical as possible.

As far as Europe is concerned, they certainly achieved a great deal, the Rover 3500 winning a "Car of the Year Award," the "Don Safety Trophy," the "AA Gold Medal" and

the "Style Auto Award," all in its first year of existence.

In secondary safety this model follows the traditions started by the Rover 2000 many years ago. Energy absorption has been incorporated in the sides of the monocoque structure for protection in side impacts, as well as head on accidents where progressive crumple comes into play. The fuel pump is fitted with a cut off that halts fuel flow in the event of an accident.

Interior design has produced plenty of energy absorbing material around the cabin, even the centre of the steering wheel being a large crash pad.

A Triplex Ten Twenty laminated windshield is fitted, this turning to smooth powdery consistency in an accident, rather than shattering into sharp pieces. Normal stone impacts merely chip the surface slightly, furthermore, it can cope easily with head impacts, giving sufficiently for the head to be retained inside the car.

Primary safety on the passive side is catered for by neat side window demisting, two speed wipers and electric washers and exterior rear view mirrors either side, both of which are adjustable by remote control. The sharply raked rear window has a heater element in it, but no wiper as its angle makes it self cleaning due to airflow.

Making an even greater contribution to primary safety are high standards of road holding and braking.

Durability shouldn't be too much of a problem for owners as the underside is coated with a bitumen based material, the

steel lower sills are zinc coated and the whole car is finished in a high grade thermoplastic paint. The body sills themselves are also pressure ventilated by air flow in order to prevent rust breeding moisture from being trapped within.

The exhaust system is aluminised. Assisting with better maintenance will be the diagnostic plug point which can be linked up with a diagnostic machine when being serviced, in order to monitor engine efficiency.

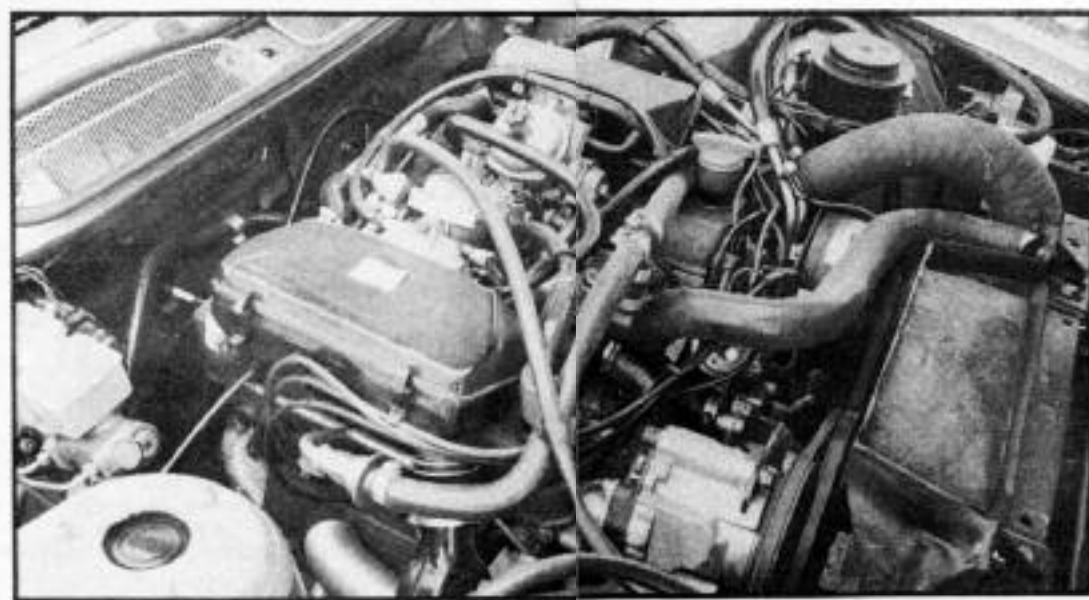
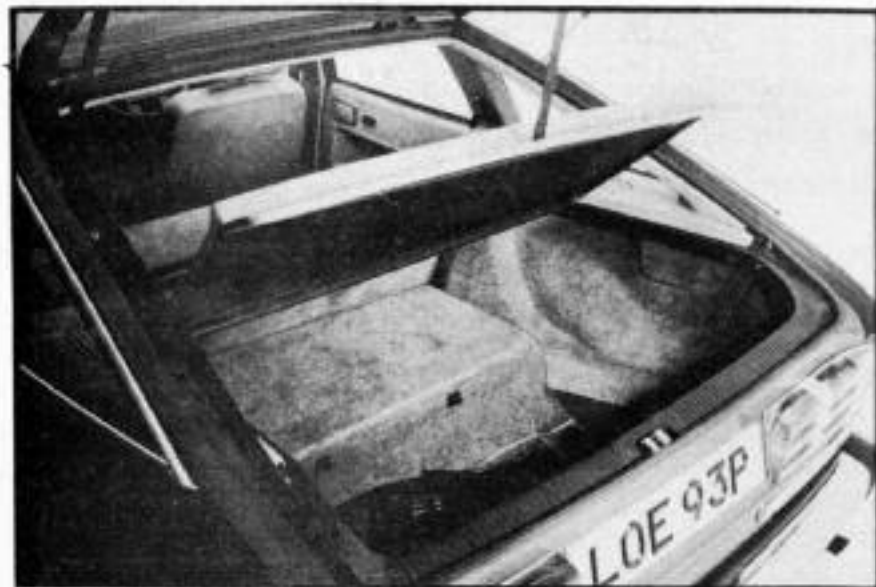
It's hard to know where to start when trying to describe the Rover's many features. It's a veritable "Pandora's Box" of gismos to be sure!

Interior trim in brushed velour is sumptuous, yet restrained, while the most imposing thing about the view from the driving seat is the vastness of the dashboard. It's like an enlarged version of that fitted to the Triumph TR7, necessitated by the very sharp sweepback of the windshield. The main instrument fascia tends to look a little like an afterthought though, a black box mounted on top of the dash.

Beyond the rather odd square steering wheel, a very comprehensive set of instrumentation is easily read. Banks of buttons for other functions take a little sorting out, but it all falls into place quickly.

To the left of the main instrument panel, there's a group of small dials monitoring fuel, battery condition, oil pressure and water temperature. To the right of them there's the 220 km/h speedometer, complete with trip

New Cars



Pics above show the modern interior and particularly, the rear seat room. The hatchback gives good luggage space, even more so when the rear seat is folded down. Under the bonnet though, things are somewhat more complicated.

meter. This is separated from the 7000 rpm tachometer by an air vent. To the far right of the panel is the six button module looking after things like headlight selection, hazard warning lights and the like.

Steering column stalk controls are for the washer/wiper system (left) and the direction indicator, headlight dipping and horn (right).

The centre of the dashboard is dominated by the air conditioner outlets, as well as a quartz clock over towards the passenger side. A centre console houses the Clarion

stereo cassette player AM/FM radio, beneath which are the normal heater demister selectors. Behind the automatic gearbox T-bar are located the electric window controls.

Built into the door armrests are the door releases as well as a central lock-out. Each door also has its own door lock in the form of a rocker switch.

Firm but very comfortable seats are well formed to fit the body closely, with plenty of lumbar support. Although there is control for sliding the squab to and fro, as well as reclining the back, there's no seat height adjustment.

To tailor the driving position to individual needs, the steering wheel can be altered both for rake and for steering column length. The locking screw is located in a bin above the driver's knees, this almost matching the large bin on the front passenger side.

Even with the front seats extended rearwards on their runners, rear seat passengers have plenty of leg room. There's enough for three across the rear with ease. For just two, a central armrest adds even more to comfort.

Wide opening doors make entry and exit simple and uncomplicated. Just one of the many safety features of the Rover is the red warning lights fitted to the front doors. These light up the moment the door is opened, to warn on-coming traffic.

Storage space for bits and pieces can be found everywhere. The top of the dashboard on the passenger's side features a wide space surrounded by a lip to prevent things from sliding backwards under acceleration. In addition there are small mouldings in the centre console for cigarette packets and the like.

Access to the engine compartment isn't the easiest, once the hood release has been located inside the driver's side locker bin. The hood rises to the front, being supported on two small neat gas struts. The compartment itself is literally packed with engine and ancillaries, including the sops to our ADR 27a requirements. Still, one has to assume that the home handyman won't be doing a great deal of work on this, so perhaps that's the dealer's worry.

For Australia, the 114 kW of the European engine fade away to 102, while the 268 Nm for Europe shrink to 245 here. The local engine has a compression ratio of 8.13:1 as well, rather than the other motor's 9.25:1. Still, the performance, though sluggish initially, is sufficient for the job in hand.

It's the same Oldsmobile/Buick originated aluminium unit as fitted to the old Rover 3500, driving through a Borg Warner 65 three speed automatic transmission, fitted as standard, to Australian specification cars.

Suspension at the rear is by a live axle which is coil sprung and located through four longitudinal links and a transverse Watts linkage. This set-up appears quite effective in getting the power to the road with a minimum of fuss, although it can hop around a little on rougher surfaces.

Front suspension is by McPherson struts, these allowing a fine turning circle of 10.4 metres which is particularly good for a wheelbase of 2820 mm (longer than a Falcon).

Power assisted brakes are 258mm discs at the front with drums at the rear, the system being augmented by a compensator valve to prevent rear lock up, especially when the brakes are cold.

Rack and pinion steering is power assisted.

A rather beautifully styled body immediately creates a great deal of interest in the car. People find it hard to believe that it's a Rover, most assuming it's a Citroen or some other European continental marque.

With an automatic choke fitted, starting the 3500 is no problem, the alloy V8 running a little lumpy until warmed up, although with little or no noise. Moving the centre T-bar through the "R," "N," "D" sequence requires little effort, hardly felt notches indicating each move. Returning the lever is far less positive as there's little or no feel as each position is engaged. It requires a quick look down to ensure the lever is in the right slot.

At first the power steering seems to lack feel. After only a short while however, the driver's sensitivity adjusts and he is then able to enjoy superb precision. Initial response is excellent, assisted greatly by the steel radial Pirelli Cinturato tyres of 195 width. These

are fitted to cast alloy wheels which will be a standard feature of the Rovers sold in Australia.

We understand that production models will arrive fitted with Michelin tyres as standard though.

The precision of the steering is complemented well by the car's roadholding despite an apparently long wheelbase. Driving around Sydney's Double Bay and Vaucluse areas, it took the switchback corners easily on a steady line and could be placed exactly where required. This was made a little uncanny by the almost complete lack of body roll.

The flat ride has a few drawbacks though. The ride is firm and over pronounced transverse ridges there's a measure of impact harshness. Even so, all this serves to provide a sporting feel to the car rather than the wallow you get from so many luxury machines.

Braking is precise too. There's plenty of feel in the pedal for normal slowing down, plus lots of power in the brakes for a rapid stop from high speed where necessary.

Noise levels throughout are very low, only a little wind noise coming through the window surrounds.

Overall visibility is surprisingly good when the high waist line of the body is taken into consideration.

It tends to be a little difficult to judge the extremities though, the nose falling away as it does at the front and the rear being so far from the driving seat. Even so the view to the rear generally is good despite the steep angle of the rear glass.

Lighting up time requires the movement of a small switch on the steering column, followed by the light selection on the illuminated bank of buttons to the right of the instrument panel. A large rheostat wheel to the right of the panel regulates instrument lighting intensity.

Halogen headlights have a good spread and on full beam a suitable range for the performance of the car.

On the matter of performance, most of the initial driving was in and around Sydney, with little opportunity to take figures. According to Leyland however, 18.05 seconds should be the mark for the standing 400 metres, together with a zero to 100 km/h time of 11.7 seconds. They're talking of a 190 km/h top speed.

As we said earlier, it's only a pity the Rover 3500 took so long getting to Australia. Now it's here however, we predict that it will have a ready market amongst the luxury set, despite a rather high price tag.

Leyland Australia is looking at the sale of around 1500 units a year, and if the car is as durable and serviceable under our conditions as it is good looking, it should be another success story to add to those already written by the team at the revitalised Leyland Australia HQ. □