

# THE CAR THE P76 COULD HAVE BECOME

The people at Leyland wince when you mention the P76 and the new Rover 3500 V8 in the same breath, because one is a reminder of past disasters and the other their hope for the future.

Yet the cars are alike in many ways.

Like the Australian-designed P76 — which went out of production in the Leyland collapse of 1974 — the new Rover has an aluminium alloy V8 engine, strut front suspension, and a live axle with coils at the rear.

Both have wedge-shaped bodies.

Both are relatively simple cars which followed complex and unconventional models.

In the case of the P76, it followed the front-wheel-drive Austin Tasman and Kimberley series, while the Rover succeeded the P6 range, which had such odd features as a cranked front suspension system, de Dion rear end and bolt-on body panels.

In market appeal, however, the models are as alike as the classic samples of chalk and cheese.

The P76 was intended to be Leyland Australia's weapon to counter Holden-Falcon-Valiant successes in the days when those models dominated sales.

Making such a car was an enterprise Leyland couldn't afford, and the multi-million dollar cost was a burden that put the company out of local manufacture.

Had the P76 been allowed to continue, it could well have developed into a car like the new Rover.

The coupe version of the P76, the Force Seven hatchback, shows, quite dramatically, how close the concepts were.

The Rover 3500 V8 is a luxury car, aimed at lapping some of the cream currently being devoured by makes like Volvo, Alfa Romeo, Lancia, Peugeot, Citroen and BMW.

Aimed below the price level of Mercedes-Benz and Jaguar models, it is still well clear of the dogfight that marks competition for the family car market.

The new Rover costs \$19,995.

The Leyland people anticipate selling all they can get, which should be around 2,800 units in the next year.

# HAVE BECOME

By EVAN GREEN

It means the model — which won the European Car of the Year Award on its release in 1977 — should have had the early-bugs ironed out of its system.

The new Rover seems to have been relatively free of major troubles although, on visits to England, I have heard of owners complaining of rusting and rattles.

Happily, those tarnishing wrinkles appear to have been ironed out of the car.

Part of the reason for the Rover's success lies in the fact that it is a simple car.

Beneath that striking body is a fairly rudimentary specification; by the standards of many luxury cars.

It is a classic example of a conventional design being polished into refinement by clever engineering.

The engine is the well known 3,528-litre aluminium V8.

That, of course, was the motor originally designed by Oldsmobile in the USA, and used by Jack Brabham and Repco to win a couple of world championships in the mid-1960s.

It has powered a variety of Rover models, including the Range-Rover, and was the basis for the 4.4 litre P76 engine.

Its age, however, is no

disadvantage, for the lightweight engine is still the envy of most car makers, who can't afford the cost of switching from their traditional cast-iron motors.

The engine develops 102 kW — 13 kW less than the British version because Britain has less stringent pollution laws.

Maximum power is developed at the relatively high figure of 5,000 rpm, so the motor is designed to be worked hard.

Only automatic versions are being brought to Australia at the moment. The unit is the Borg-Warner 65, which has three speeds.

Leyland may bring manual models if there is a demand.

The brakes are a controversial feature, for the Rover designer Spen King abandoned his previous use of four discs to go for a disc-front, drum-rear set-up.

He justifies the use of drums at the rear for several reasons.

They allow a simpler hand brake mechanism, they are smooth in operation, and they don't have to handle the heavy loads of the front brakes.

And, of course, they are cheaper.

The suspension uses MacPherson struts and an anti-roll bar at the front, and a live axle with coil spring and damper units at the rear.

The rear axle is located by radius rods, with transverse location

by a Watts linkage. Ride levelling units are fitted.

The car is 4,698m long, 1,768m wide and 1,354m high. It has a wheelbase of 2,815m and ground clearance of 155mm.

The turning circle is 10.4m.

Although the car is imported, a number of features are added in Australia.

They include the side intrusion panels in the doors — which must add considerably to costs — and the air-conditioning system, which is a standard fitting on the local model.

Other standard items include central door locking, electrically operated windows, tinted side and rear glass, brushed-nylon seat coverings, cut-pile carpets, and AM/FM radio and cassette player safety lights on the front doors, childproof rear door locks, halogen head lamps and a Triplex Twenty laminated windscreen.

The Rover will accelerate from 0-100 km/h in 11 seconds and cover a standing-start 400m in 18 seconds.

On my test, the car gave 18 litres/100 km, or 16.5 mpg, but the test course was severe, with a couple of mountain passes to negotiate.

I also drove the car harder than the average owner; a figure around 12 litres/100km, or 24 mpg, should be possible under ordinary touring conditions.

The Rover is ex-

ceptionally comfortable and roomy.

The seats are well shaped and the interior gives a feeling of spaciousness which is remarkable in a car with such sleek lines.

Head and leg room are far above average.

Back-seat passengers enjoy as comfortable a ride as those in front, although forward vision is limited by the tall head-rests.

Instruments are contained in a lift-out pod, which rests on the dashboard like an afterthought.

It's not, of course, but a piece of modular design which looks either good or bad depending on the colour scheme. Some models I saw have black instrument modules resting on beige facias, which will make people who care about colours moan with distress.

The good point about this arrangement is that the driver gets a clear view of all essential instruments.

The ride is good, although not exceptional for a car of this price.

Handling is safe. The car can be driven quickly along tricky roads, with tight bends provoking slight understeer.

Leyland has been in such well-publicised strife for so long that it is easy to overlook the outstanding success of speciality car divisions — Jaguar Triumph and Rover.

Leyland Australia has honed down its range to concentrate on models from those successful marques.

It is now a highly profitable operation and the new Rover 3500 V8 — the model which carries on the pioneering concept of the much maligned P76 — is certain to add to its success.



The Rover 3500 V8 . . . European Car of the Year when it was launched.