

AUSTRALIA'S TOP-SELLING MOTOR MAGAZINE

\$1.25\*

# WHEELS

MAY, 1979



## FORD CHASES THE COMMODORE

Getting to grips with the XD Falcon

Comparing: Sigma / Datsun 200B / Sunbird / Mazda 626

Scoop photos: The new Rolls

STRIKES, SHIPPING problems and quotas aside, Leyland Australia believes it will get 1800 new Rover 3500 V8s to sell in 1979. After 2500 km behind its not quite round steering wheel we can see no reason why the 1800 won't be snapped up by luxury car buyers, many of whom would not have considered a Rover before.

Yet, despite our conviction that the new 3500 will be a best seller and shake the lower reaches of the prestige market by its Gucci shirt tails, we also believe that most of these owners won't appreciate the new Rover for what it really is.

Unfortunately for Australians what it really is, is a watered-down version of the car sold in England and Europe. You see, the new 3500 is almost unbelievably sporting in its dynamic qualities, more sporting, in fact, than even BMWs, until now the prestige sedans for enthusiasts.

But this sportiness has been diluted by the local emission control requirements — yes, once more on a European luxury car — and by the non-availability of Rover's excellent five-speed manual gearbox.

We were objective enough to understand that the great bulk of luxury cars sold in this country come as automatics, indeed you can't buy a manual Mercedes-Benz or Jaguar or BMW 6 or 7 series or Peugeot or most of the others in Australia. Perhaps the performance loss and the auto-only won't matter in Australia but we're sure that a small group of more enlightened buyers will come to despise ADR 27A and see Leyland's reluctance to bring in the manual version as capitulation to an unknowing majority.

Excuse our cynicism but there is a great car trying to escape from the stranglehold of 27A and although we remain keen enthusiasts for the 3500 it's hard not to avoid a feeling of disappointment on coming back to the Rover and suffering the lack of bottom end urge when you know that without 27A it would be a truly sparkling performer.

If the combination of the Borg Warner Type 65 automatic and the pollution equipment have mutilated the acceleration they can't detract completely from the Rover's abilities across the black-top as a responsive driver's car.

Of course, most people who buy the 3500 will do so for its sleek styling, its modern in-

terior and its prestige and will be completely unaware that it gives of its best cruising fast on a long interstate haul or when being driven quickly down a smoothly surfaced twisty section of road.

Yes, it will be totally at home on a gentle run to the Opera House or to pick up the kids from school but it was not designed with these mundane functions high on its list of priorities.

The Rover 3500 SD1 — Specialist Division Number One — began life in 1971 when Rover was still very autonomous within British Leyland and it was intended to replace all the existing Rover models — 2000, 3500 and 3.5-litre — and ultimately the 2000/2500 Triumph range. Even in 1971 David Bache — Rover's chief stylist — was convinced the next Rover should be a versatile five-door sedan and the SD1's styling was approved by February 1972. It was a total turn around from previous Rover styling although those who know of the origins of the 2000's styling will remember it had a sloping nose. Today the nose on the Rover bears a striking resemblance to the Ferrari Daytona and it was certainly compared directly with a couple of Maseratis, a Jensen and a Mercedes-Benz in the final stages of its development.

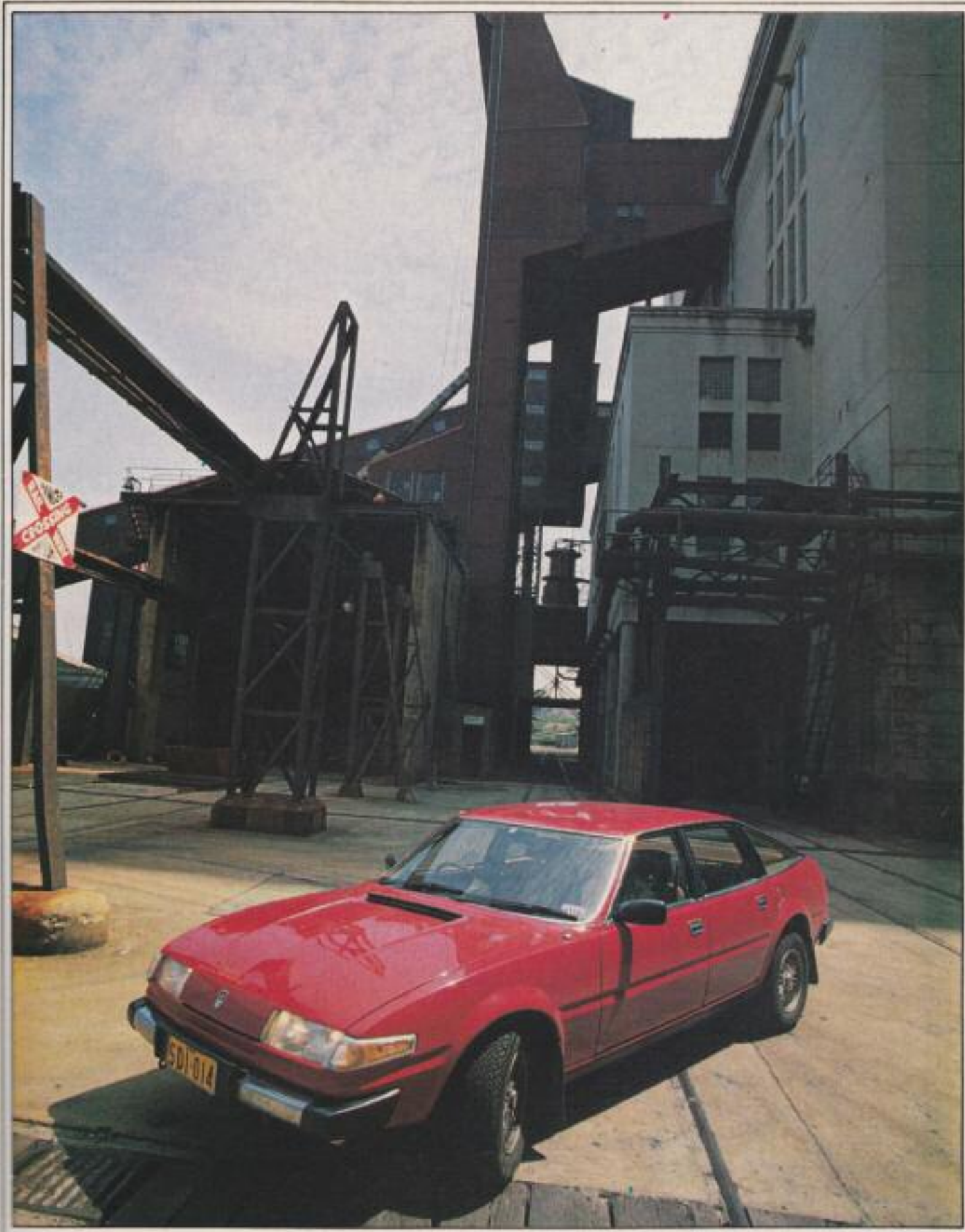
Perhaps it also shows some similarities with the Citroen CX and the Lancia Gamma sedan but that is pure coincidence. Certainly the styling is dramatic and will prove to be a major factor in the car's success. Few people who saw the test car disliked it and most were extremely enthusiastic about the shape. Despite a very deep waist and rather shallow windows it has excellent proportions although it does tend to look rather high at the tail and that sweeping waistline rises unnecessarily at the rear.

If the rakish styling was unexpected from a Rover the SD1's conventional specification belies the appearance and the advanced design tradition established by the previous all-new Rover, the 2000. In place of the four wheel disc brakes came front discs and rear drums, the De Dion rear suspension was replaced by a live axle, coil springs and self levelling dampers, the complex front suspension vanished in favor of MacPherson struts and the base-unit structure became a unit construction.

Rover's new 3500  
— strangled by ADR 27A, but still . . .

# A SPORTING LIMOUSINE

Conventional, even simple in its specification, the new Rover five-door sedan hits hard at established luxury cars and yet it is decidedly more sporting than many people will ever know. Sadly that sportiness has been hamstrung by our emission requirements and the non-availability of a manual version. Still, that won't stop it becoming a best seller.



What we now have, two and a half years after the car was first released in England, is a largish five-door sedan that is remarkably close in size to the HZ/HC Falcon in both wheelbase and overall length although it is a little narrower.

At \$19,995 it is more expensive than the 264 Volvo and Citroen CX but cheaper than the 604 Peugeot, the '79 Audi 5E Executive, the 528i BMW and all Mercedes-Benz models sold in Australia. Leyland's other luxury car, the XJ Jaguar, is higher priced while the local competition from the General's Caprice and Ford's LTD is considerably cheaper. And it's not silly to include the Commodore SL/E as a rival even though it is a little over half the price of the 3500.

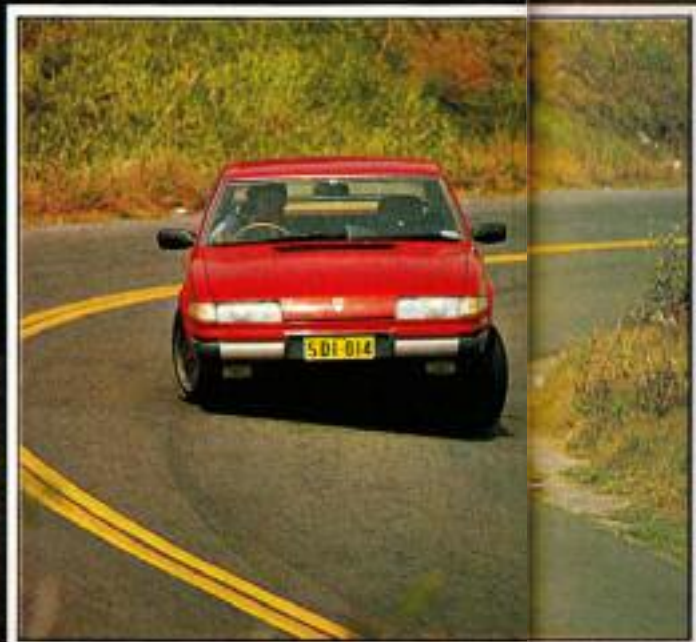
Leyland believes the new Rover can draw sales from the Americans at the lower end of the luxury market and the Europeans at the upper limits. There can be no doubt that Volvo is the most obvious target with 1400 264s registered in 1979 of the 4000 European cars sold in the class. Because the Rover is alone among the Europeans with a V8 engine we don't believe Leyland is being overly ambitious in its marketing plans.

And despite our disappointment with its performance any comparison with the European competition shows the Rover up in a very favorable light. When Leyland launched the 3500 in 1976 it was greeted with the kind of lyrical enthusiasm Australian motoring writers gave the Holden Commodore and the magazine road tests obtained quite startling performance figures for the car. Even the automatic turned in acceleration times which would do justice to a five-litre Australian car. But 27A has taken its toll and the acceleration is now very similar to the 4.2-litre Commodore SL/E we tested in WHEELS, January. While the power output and rev range of the lovely little GM-developed, Rover-built alloy V8 was raised for the 3500 the engine for the local car produces 102 kW at 5000 rpm and 45 Nm at 3000 rpm compared to 115.6 kW at 5250 rpm and 268 Nm at 2500 rpm on the British specification car.

The narrower spread power figures are reflected on the Castlereagh Drag Strip where we run our performance figures. The 27A test car got through the standing 400 metres in 18.5 seconds which doesn't compare at all well with the 17.2 seconds quoted by one of the more authoritative British weeklies. Leyland Australia's engineers have run their own performance figures on the car and claim a time of 18.05 for the standing 400m so perhaps our test car was slightly below par.

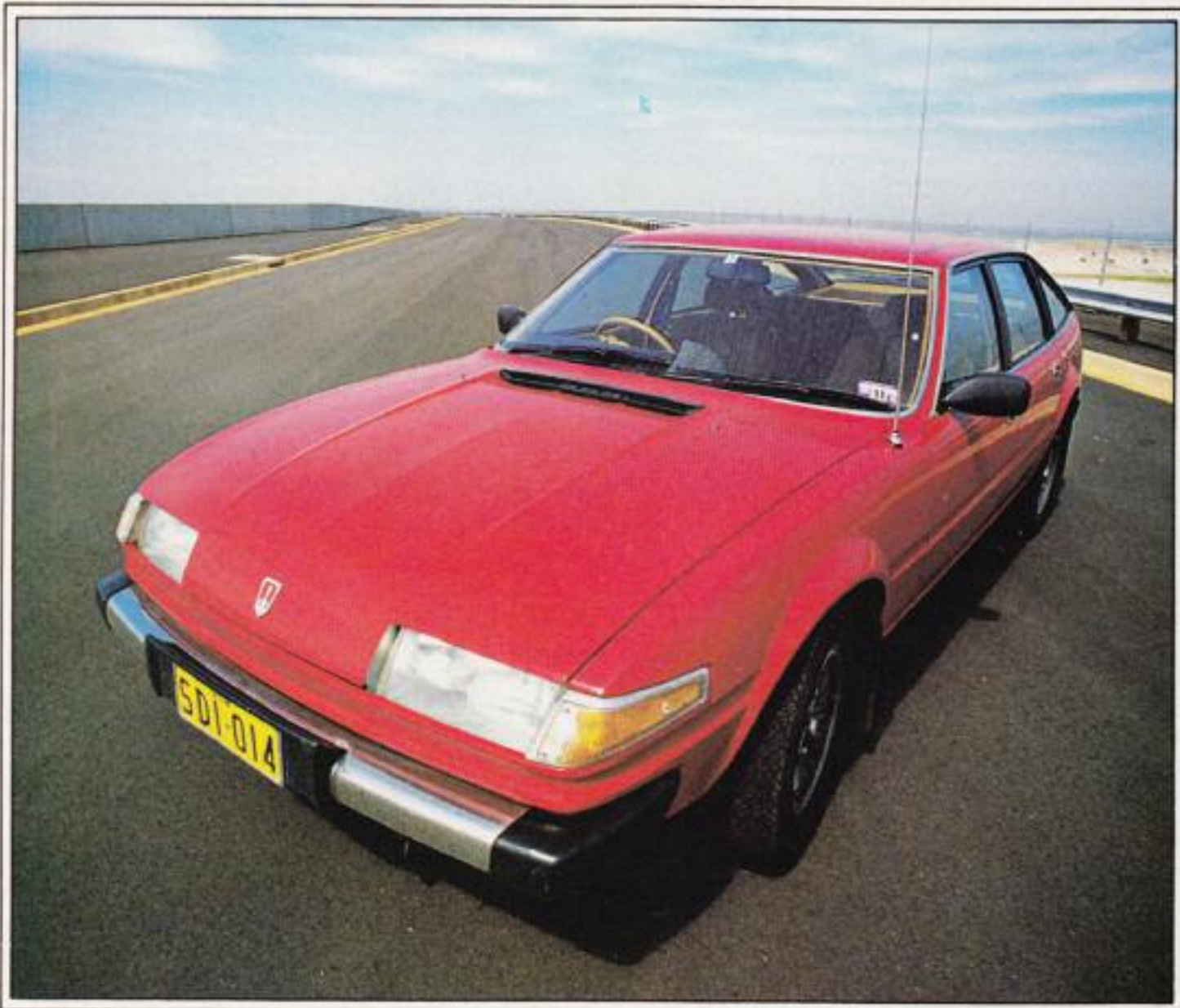
Leave the Rover in drive and you are aware of the lack of bottom end torque because of the transmission's reluctance to kick down. Use the auto selector manually — and it slips straight back into intermediate — and the kickdown is far more effective with the acceleration times significantly reduced. Keen drivers will find they frequently use the transmission in this way for the higher maximum speed it gives in low and of course, second and the reduced passing times.

But these things are relative and any comparison with the 27A European opposition



Right: Interior is superbly designed, dashboard can be easily converted to left hand drive. Driver sits up tall, but passengers in the rear will find the cushion too low.

Below: With the rear seat folded and the parcel tray removed — but where do you put it? — the 3500 has a vast luggage area finished in plush carpet.



shows the Rover up in a favorable light. The Peugeot 604, for instance, has a standing 400 metre time of a dismal 20.1 seconds and takes 6.8 seconds to get from 70 km/h to 100 km/h compared to the Rover's 5.6 seconds. The Audi 5E Executive spends 19.8 seconds between the white lines at Castle-reagh and seven seconds getting from 70-100 km/h while the only V6 Volvo we've tested recently — a 265 — took 19.5 seconds to cover the standing 400 m and 6.9 seconds getting from 70 km/h to 100 km/h in a kick-down condition.

Clearly, if the Rover isn't quick the others are dreadfully slow. The meeting of ADR 27A not only eats into the car's performance but in all cases we've quoted detracts noticeably from the smoothness and crispness of the engines.

We don't want to create the wrong impression about the 3500. Yes, we do find the acceleration times disappointing when compared to those obtained on the overseas cars but this is one very good example of straight line performance not really counting for very much on the open road. Drive the Rover correctly and it will cruise easily and comfortably at 140 km/h with strong performance for a car of this size and engine capacity.

The ADR27A engine will run out to the redline of 6000 rpm — there is a warning section from 5500 rpm — but under full throttle there is more induction noise than a car of the Rover's breeding deserves. It starts easily — the Australian car has an automatic choke in place of the manual choke used elsewhere — but the warming up period is longer than normal.

The engine noise does intrude and so does a whine from the transmission on the over-run, wind noise (rustle, perhaps would be better) from around the A-pillar above 140 km/h and some tyre and road noise on coarse surfaces. So the Rover is not a super quiet car.

Perhaps the noise levels are almost deliberately built in to be a part of the car's sporting character for, as we've said, the roadholding and handling and even the ride are strongly biased in this direction. It is the steering — power-assisted rack and pinion with only 2.75 turns lock to lock — which is the key to sportiness for it is superbly responsive, with just the right degree of artificial feel built-in, and weighted perfectly. First time drivers will find it too sensitive to very small wheel movements and will go down the road in a series of corrections but they will soon come to appreciate the subtlety of the steering and wonder why other power steering set-ups aren't as responsive and as high geared.

It is only when the Rover is cornered very hard, with the power on, in tight conditions that the car loses its composure and the near neutral handling changes to strong and increasing understeer. That is when you are trying way over the speeds most people ever drive at, normally the 3500 just goes exactly where it is pointed only being thrown off line momentarily by the bigger bumps at the tail.

The 3500s sold in Australia come on either Michelin or Pirelli steel radials and no less

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Steering wheel is adjustable for rake and reach, front seats appear to be short under the thighs but all our drivers found them comfortable.



Left: Major instruments are easily read but small gauges are hidden by steering wheel and driver's left hand.

Below left: Centre console has controls for electric windows, speaker adjustment, cigarette lighter and very effective handbrake. Auto selector can be pulled straight back to intermediate.



# A SPORTING LIMOUSINE

Continued from page 49

an authority than Spen King — the man most responsible for the car being the way it is — reckons that although the suspension was designed around the Pirellis the Michelins give a better overall performance. Certainly they are quieter in cornering than the Pirellis fitted to the test car. One of the great virtues of the Rover is its sure-footedness on wet roads. It is one of those very rare cars that copes so well in the rain that the driver hardly has to reduce speed at all.

Rover's decision to switch back to disc/drum brakes was taken because it was much easier — and we suspect cheaper — to build in a hand brake. The brakes are still very good although some minor fade was experienced during our ultimate brake fade test course. Generally, though, the pedal is progressive and the 3500 always stops in a straight line without rear wheel lock-up.

The ride is a little harsh at low speeds, harsh is perhaps too strong and a better

word would be firm. Our hesitation is only because if the Rover is considered as a luxury sedan then in certain conditions the car doesn't have the soft ride normally expected of such a car. Regard it as a sporting sedan, however and the ride is excellent. In ultimate terms, when cruising, the ride is very good by anyone's standards, the Rover having the ability to soak up undulations and bumps in a manner that suits its image as a long distance touring car.

The seats look great and are very comfortable. Some testers thought they should have more thigh support but still didn't get uncomfortable and others reckoned the seats needed more in the way of lumbar support for the small of the back yet despite long terms behind the wheel also arrived feeling relaxed. However the rear seat cushion is too low in relation to the floor and the high waist line. The reason it is low is obviously so that the rear seat back can simply fold down on the cushion when the car is converted to its station wagon role.

We have no doubt that the interior design of the Rover is going to win over many potential buyers. It is modern without being outlandish, clever without being smart, and practical without being stark.

The dashboard is a large one-piece plastic

moulding (that tries, but fails, to look like leather) that sweeps down from the windscreen and across the entire width of the car. In front of the driver is a large black instrument module which carries the instruments, warning lights and a small control panel. The two large dials for the speedometer and tachometer are easy to read but the steering wheel and the driver's left hand hide the minor controls. It is also worth mentioning that the far left figure of the trip meter is hidden by the speedometer needle when the car is stationary... exactly the time when you want to be able to take a reading.

There are bins for both the driver and front seat passenger and the tray built into the top of the dashboard carries a black rubber mat to prevent items sliding around. All the local cars get air conditioning as standard equipment. The centre dash vents of the non-air conditioned cars are retained but they are now mounted on another black plastic console that juts out from the dash. The air conditioning has an excellent capacity but the fan — even on the slowest speed — is too noisy. There are additional vents between the tachometer and speedometer so that the driver can aim the cool air into his face and the front seat passenger has a similar vent.

Small alloy V8 was originally designed and built by GM has been adopted by Rover but strangled by ADR 27A.

An AM/FM cassette radio is built into the console just above the heater/ventilation controls. Steering column stalks take care of the wiper washers which are very slow to operate, while the headlight flashers, turn indicators, dip and horn are controlled by the stalk on the right of the column. The steering wheel is adjustable for reach and rake so the driving position is almost infinitely adjustable even though very tall drivers might wish for slightly more rearward travel and perhaps even a height adjustment for the cushion.

Electric windows are standard — and there's a control to cut out the rear window switches so the kids don't spend all day zipping them up and down — and so is a central locking system.

Summing the Rover is not easy. It is a car we enjoyed for its great practicality, its charm and responsiveness. The finish isn't perhaps to the standard expected from traditional Rovers and we still believe it is hamstrung by 27A and the lack of a manual transmission. We once said it was a nice car and it is a very nice car and also great value for money.



Conventional boot with parcel tray in place. Luggage sill is high. Rear window remains clean even in dirty weather, doesn't seem to need rear wiper/washer system.

## SPECIFICATIONS

MAKE	ROVER		
MODEL	3500 V8		
BODY TYPE	Five-door sedan		
PRICE:			
Basic	\$19,995		
OPTIONS FITTED	None		
ENGINE:			
Cylinders	Eight		
Valves	Overhead		
Carburettor	Twin Zenith-Stromberg 175 CD (automatic choke)		
Compression ratio	8.13 to 1		
Bore x stroke	88.9 x 71.12 mm		
Capacity	3.528 litres		
Power at 5000 rpm	102 kW		
Torque at 3000 rpm	245 Nm		
TRANSMISSION:			
Type	Borg-Warner 65, three-speed automatic		
RATIOS:			
	Gearbox	Overall	km/h per 1000 rpm
First	2.39:1	7.36:1	15.5
Second	1.45:1	4.46:1	25.5
Third	1.00:1	3.08:1	37.0
Final drive	3.08:1		
CHASSIS AND RUNNING GEAR:			
Suspension, front	Independent, MacPherson struts, anti-roll bar		
Suspension, rear	Live axle, located by torque tube, Watts linkage, radius arms, coil springs, Boge Wiromat self-levelling damper struts		
Steering type	Power assisted rack and pinion		
Turns l to r	2.75		
Turning circle	10.4 m		
Brakes, type	Disc/drum		
DIMENSIONS:			
Wheelbase	2815 mm		
Track, front	1500 mm		
Track, rear	1500 mm		
Length	4698 mm		
Width	1768 mm		
Height	1354 mm		
Fuel tank capacity	65.9 litres		
Kerb mass (weight)	1428 kg		
TYRES:			
Size	Pirelli Cinturato CN36 195/70 HR14		

## PERFORMANCE

TEST CONDITIONS:					
Weather	Warm, dry				
Surface	Castlereagh Drag Strip				
Load	Two persons				
Fuel	Premium				
SPEEDOMETER ERROR:					
Indicated km/h	50	70	90	110	130
Actual km/h	49	69	86	104	122
FUEL CONSUMPTION ON TEST:					
Check one	7.3 km/l (20.7 mpg) over 220 km				
Check two	6.1 km/l (17.1 mpg) over 260 km				
Check three	5.5 km/l (15.5 mpg) over 131 km				
Check four	6.5 km/l (18.2 mpg) over 250 km				
MAXIMUM SPEEDS:					
Fastest run	183 km/h				
Average all runs	181 km/h				
IN GEARS:					
Drive:					
First	74 km/h (4750 rpm)				
Second	128 km/h (5000 rpm)				
Third	181 km/h (4900 rpm)				
Held:					
First	93 km/h (6000 rpm)				
Second	140 km/h (5500 rpm)				
Third	181 km/h (4900 rpm)				
ACCELERATION:					
Through the gears:					
0-50 km/h	3.7 secs				
0-70 km/h	6.2 secs				
0-90 km/h	8.9 secs				
0-110 km/h	12.3 secs				
0-130 km/h	17.5 secs				
In the gears: Kickdown					
30-60 km/h	3.2 secs				
40-70 km/h	3.4 secs				
50-80 km/h	3.7 secs				
60-90 km/h	4.8 secs				
70-100 km/h	5.6 secs				
80-110 km/h	6.3 secs				
90-120 km/h	6.9 secs				
100-130 km/h	7.6 secs				
STANDING START (0-400m):					
Fastest run	18.5 secs				
Average all runs	18.6 secs				

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