

Rover SD1 3500



1978 Rover 3500 SD1

When released in the mid 1970s, the big Rover SD1 3500 was a radical departure for the British prestige maker.

Its hatchback body was virtually unknown in the luxury car field as, at the time, only small economy cars used hatchbacks.

Despite, or perhaps because of its trend setting body, Rover's SD1 was eventually a sales success. Initially the SD1 (it stands for Specialist Division project 1) suffered badly from quality problems and had the ignominy of being named the worst car of the year by an important British motor magazine.

However, most of the troubles had been fixed up by the time the Rover reached Australia.

The Rover's sleek body hides a 3.5 litre V-8 engine which has plenty of power and torque to give a good performance, though some engineering to reduce exhaust emission level was done at a budget rate, so the engine lost power. In Australia we did not see any of the six cylinder versions used in some countries.

The suspension design is simple mechanically but sophisticated in layout. The SD1 handles well and its occupants are isolated from all but the worst road shocks.

There's a reasonable amount of passenger space for five but the Rover is best regarded as a four seater for long trips. The luggage area is huge because of the body shape and the rear seat back can be folded down to increase it further.

Spare parts prices are about average for an imported European car and, on the whole, the parts are still readily available. Naturally there are not

many dealers about but those which are in business are well trained and can usually get a disabled car back on the road again without too much delay.

Insurance premiums are marginally lower than might be expected. This is because the SD1 has generally sold to a conservative buyer in Australia rather than to the young executive in a hurry as tended to be the case in Britain.

The first official imports of the SD1 3500 to Australia took place in December 1978, almost two years after the British release, the initial imports were all fitted with a three speed automatic transmission.

A minor facelift was introduced in March 1980 when the location of the front air intake was changed to the area above the bumper bar. At the same time a five speed manual transmission was added to the range. Up to this stage all cars were of the same trim level and simply called Rover 3500.

A major facelift in March 1982 saw the model range expand. Known as the Series 2, the new car had a larger rear window, different front end styling and bumpers which wrap all the way around to the wheel arches for better body protection. The models were by now the Rover 3500SE and the Rover 3500 Vanden Plas, the latter being a very well equipped luxury version with such items as a quality stereo system, sumptuous interior trim, central door locking and electric windows. The engine in the Series 2 is fuel injected in the interests of greater combustion efficiency.

The big Rover remained on the Australian market until August 1987 when it was replaced by an all new model, the Rover 825i. This car is powered by a V-6 engine and was designed in close cooperation with the Japanese Honda company.

Fuel consumption for the 3500 series is fairly high, as you might expect in the case of a big car with a V8 engine.



1978 Rover 3500 SD1 interior

A 1978 model SD1 costs about \$8500 and a 1987 automatic 3500SE is priced around \$29 000. The Vanden Plas sells for \$2000 to \$4000 more than the SE depending on its age and condition. Cars with the five speed manual transmission are worth \$500 to \$1000 less than an automatic equivalent.



1982 Rover 3500 SD1

Rust can be a problem, especially in some early SD1s, and it is sometimes expensive to fix. Look in the door bottom corners, the door sills, the top and bottom corners of the front guards. Check also for rust in the leading edges of the bonnet where stone chips may have exposed the base metal. A badly fitted rear hatch is not uncommon, so look for water stains in the boot around the hatch and for water in the spare wheel well.

The Rover's engine is generally long lasting but when they let go, they are costly to repair. Look for signs of oil fumes at the exhaust and the oil filler. Check for signs of coolant leakage at the cylinder head gasket and the water pump. Sluggish performance is often a sign of engine wear but may simply indicate that a tune up is needed.

Make sure the radiator and cooling system are in top notch condition as the all alloy engine is vulnerable to overheating problems.

Manual gearbox operation is comparatively slow and heavy but, if severe, an overhaul may be due soon. Automatics with slurred changes and which are slow to go into gear from neutral are also ready to have money spent on them.

There's still a lot of class driving to be had in one of these big British luxury cars. As they have had a bad run at times, the wise buyer will have it checked over by an expert before going too deeply into the deal.

SPECIFICATION CHART

MODEL: Rover SD1 3500 1979 to 1987

Body types available: 5 door hatchback

Number sold in Australia when new: 5350

Engine: 3.5 litre, OHV V-8, some with fuel injection

Rear wheel drive with 4 speed or 5 speed manual, 3 speed auto transmission

Suspension: MacPherson struts at front, live rear axle with coils

Brakes: Disc/drum combination

Steering system: Rack and pinion, 10.4 metre turning circle with power assistance

DIMENSIONS: Length 4698 mm; Width 1788 mm; Height 1354 mm;
Wheelbase 2815 mm; Ground Clearance 160 mm; Kerb Weight 1428 kg
Rated tow capacity (standard vehicle): 1500 kg
Insurance Council of Australia category: 3

PERFORMANCE (when new) 1982 3500SE, 5 speed, 106 kW, injected
0-100 km/h acceleration: 11.2 secs
Speed in gears: Top — 180 km/h Fourth — 175 km/h Third — 140 km/h
Second — 90 km/h First — 55 km/h

Fuel consumption:

16.5 litres/100 km (17 mpg)

Average on highway — 15.7 litres/100 km (19 mpg)

Average in suburbs — 18.3 litres/100 km (15.5 mpg)

Fuel tank capacity: 66 litres