NEW

Left: the interior layout shows many typical Honda touches, but the overall feel of the new Rover (including velour cloth trim in the Si) is unmistakeable British luxury.

From the outside, the casual observer would never suspect the close links with the 825's oriental counterpart.

photography by Kent Mears

Joint venture

Akin to the Honda Legend, the new Rover flagship should find a niche in the Australian luxury market

by Paul Gover

What the XJ40 did for Jaguar – bringing the famous marque into the 1980s – the new Rover 825 will do for its JRA stablemate. The main difference is that the 825 will be using a healthy dose of Japanese expertise to achieve a thoroughly British result.

It's no longer news that the Rover 825 is the twin of the Honda Legend. The cars were developed jointly, and although their body designs are very different the similarities are obvious once you look beneath the skin. In fact the two cars are as close as any in the world and were actually described by some as the first true 'world' car.

The cars were developed under the celebrated Project XX, begun by the two companies in November 1982. They had collaborated before with the Triumph Acclaim of 1982, and in Australia the links between the companies have seen a number of Hondas wearing the badge of the Rover 416i (which will continue in the range as the smaller brother of the newcomer). But things are significantly different in the case of the Rover 825.

JRA, the Australian importer for both Rover and Jaguar, had the choice of sourcing its new Rover flagship from Britain or Japan and decided – quite reasonably, it seems – that it should come from the UK.

Regardless of the potential quality difference (and Rover believes its car is built to a standard that matches the Japanese), the move was a canny decision to take advantage of the relatively weak British pound and the continuing strength of the Yen. In short, money was the bottom line.

Remember that the new Rover is being pitched into the toughest area of the luxury-car market. People are buying at the bottom end, where the Ford Fairlane is still remarkable value, and they seem to have money to spend at the $100,000 mark (which has helped the Australian success of the Jaguar XJ40), but in the middle things have been very tough for more than two years.

JRA is confident that the new Rover will be considerably more successful than the Honda Legend, which has never achieved a significant market presence outside Victoria, but knows the problems it will face in today's depressed scene. Nevertheless, it has arguably the smartest marketing team of any importer, and is working with a fresh new product in a style- and money-conscious area of the luxury market. In fact the Rover 825 could hardly be more different from the car it replaces.

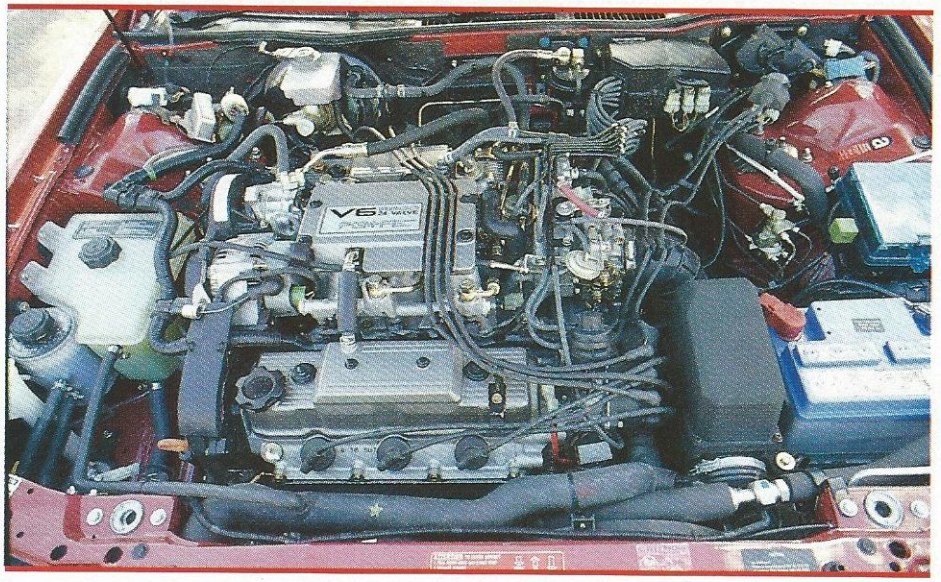
The old Rover 3500 was a traditional British luxury car: big, solid, with a V8 engine in the front driving the rear wheels. The 825 is a front-wheel drive machine with a V6 engine, and with its British style being added a long way into the design process.

JRA brought Rover's design director, Roy Axe, down under for the 825's debut. He described the Rover as an 'equal joint venture' with Honda, and a car that the British had begun planning before the link with Honda was cemented.

"The car we had in mind from the start had to provide all the traditional Rover features of luxury, performance, quality and refinement," he said.

"Rover's input to the joint project heavily influenced such factors as chassis refinement, ride and handling and interior packaging. The project has meant more than six years' work, and many millions of kilometres of both rig and on-road testing of the prototypes,

photography by Kent Mears



The V6 transverse engine produces plenty of power for a car of this size.

and we believe the final package sets new standards in this sector."

Yet driving the Rover 825 – and particularly comparing it to the Rover 3500 – it is obvious that Honda also had a big hand in the car's development.

It has the package efficiency of a Japanese car, typical Honda touches in many areas of the interior layout, and drives more like an oriental machine than a British one. But perhaps these are just signs of the changes taking place in the British motor industry as it fights for survival in a very tough world. And there is no doubt, even in these early days, that the Rover has some significant advantages over the Legend.

According to Roy Axe, Rover has made significant changes to the suspension settings for its car and these should be better suited to Australia than the Honda version, although only a long-term test will provide the answer. Certainly, any slow-speed sogginess seems to disappear at cruising speeds. The steering is always Japanese-light, and the size of the car and its V6 engine will prevent it having the long-legged feel and general handling balance of the rear-drive 3500. The 825 is a car that can be pushed along very briskly and in great style and refinement.

The rest of the mechanical package will be familiar to anyone who has had a look at the Honda's specifications.

Its 2.5-litre V6 transverse engine is a high-tech unit incorporating four-valve cylinder heads – but with single overhead camshafts – electronic fuel injection and computerised engine management. This translates into 110 kW of power and 207 Nm of torque, which is more than adequate for a car weighing 1430 kg. However, Honda has launched a 2.7-litre engine into the US market in response to criticism of the lack of torque from the motor.

Transmissions are the standard five-speed manual and four-speed automatic, although the latter has a lock-up torque convertor that operates on second, third and fourth gears when the shift selector is in the D4 position.

Suspension is fully independent with (slightly surprisingly today) double wishbones, and coil springs with an anti-roll bar at the front and struts with trailing links and transverse arms at the rear. It also features a constant-levelling system.

Brakes are discs at each corner, ventilated at the front, and there is speed-proportional power-assisted rack-and-pinion steering with 195X65 VR15 steel belted radials to keep contact with the road.

The two versions being sold in Australia – the 825Si and the 825Si Special – are both very highly specified, although there have been some early concerns from dealers about the lack of a basic model for people without $60,000 to spend.

The Si's list of standard equipment includes air conditioning, power steering, electric windows, a glass sunroof with slide and tilt options, a six-speaker sound system, velour cloth trim, infra-red central door locking and electrically-adjustable and heated rear-vision mirrors.

The 825Si Special has the added advantages of Connelly leather upholstery, a standard automatic transmission, adjustable rear head restraints, alloy wheels, additional map pockets and height-adjustable front seats.

In short, the 825 has everything it needs for success in Australia, despite the toughness of the luxury car scene.

And despite the Honda links used to develop and produce the new Rover flagship, there is no doubt that it has its own – very British – personality. □

ROVER 825Si
2.5-litre, five-speed manual

ENGINE

Location	Front, transversely mounted
Cylinders	90° V6
Bore x stroke	84.0 x 75.0 mm
Capacity	2494 cm³
Induction	Honda PGM-F1 electronic fuel injection
Compression ratio	9.0 to 1
Fuel pump	Electric
Valve gear	Cog-belt driven single OHC per bank, four valves/cyl
Claimed power	110.0 kW at 5800 rpm
Claimed torque	207.0 Nm at 4500 rpm
Maximum recommended engine speed	6500 rpm
Specific power output	44.1 kW/litre

TRANSMISSION

Type	Five-speed manual
Driving wheels	Front
Clutch	Single, dry plate

Gearbox ratios

Gear	Ratio	km/h 1000 rpm	Max Speed	At (rpm)
First	2.923	9.4	61	6500
Second	1.788	15.3	99	6500
Third	1.222	22.4	146	6500
Fourth	0.909	30.2	196	6500
Fifth	0.702	39.1	203	5200
Final-drive ratio				4.200 to 1

SUSPENSION

Front	Independent by double wishbones with coil springs and anti-roll bar
Rear	Independent by struts with coil springs and anti-roll bar
Wheels	Steel, 5.0J x 15
Tyres	Michelin MXV 195/65 VR15

BRAKES

Front	262 mm discs
Rear	260 mm discs

STEERING

Type	Power assisted rack and pinion
Turns, lock to lock	3.5
Ratio	17.6 to 1
Turning circle	11.1 metres

DIMENSIONS AND WEIGHT

Wheelbase	2760 mm
Front track	1500 mm
Rear track	1460 mm
Overall length	4690 mm
Overall width	1946 mm
Overall height	1400 mm
Ground clearance	150 mm
Kerb weight	1430 kg
Weight to power	13.0 kg/kW

CAPACITIES AND EQUIPMENT

Fuel tank	68.0 litres
Cooling system	8.8 litres
Engine oil system	5.5 litres
Battery	12V 70AH
Alternator	60 amps

CHECKLIST

Alloy wheels	No
Adjustable steering	Yes
Air-conditioning	Yes
Central door locking	Yes
Clock – digital LED	Yes
Cruise control	No
Petrol-filler lock	Yes
Power steering	Yes
Power windows	Yes
Radio	Yes
Tape player	Yes
Compact disc player	No
Rear-window wiper	No
Remote outside mirror adjustment – two electric	Yes
Sun roof	Yes
Tachometer	Yes
Trip computer	No

FUEL CONSUMPTION

Average for test	10.4 litres/100 km
Best recorded	10.2 litres/100 km
Worst recorded	10.7 litres/100 km

ACCELERATION

0-60 km/h	3.92 seconds
0-80 km/h	6.22 seconds
0-100 km/h	9.04 seconds
0-110 km/h	10.81 seconds
0-120 km/h	12.81 seconds
0-130 km/h	15.01 seconds
0-140 km/h	17.92 seconds
Standing 400m	16.46 seconds
Terminal speed	135.5 km/h
The above are averages of runs in opposite directions	
Standing 400m, best	16.25 seconds
Terminal speed, best	139.4 km/h
Figures by Datron Correvit L3 digital electronic timing equipment	
LIST PRICE	$54,380
PRICE AS TESTED	$54,380
Includes options: None	