

QUINTET

By Bob Hudson, MIAMI
The Quintet represents a major break in tradition for the Rover company.

For a start, its engine is mounted east-west and drives the front wheels; secondly, it doesn't originate in England — the first such model in Rover's 79-year history of building cars.

However, being made in Japan is certainly no handicap to the Quintet. The Honda Motor Company, which produces it for Jaguar Rover Australia, has a fine reputation for quality workmanship and specialises in building cars of this size.

The Quintet is a five-door hatchback that's only slightly bigger than a Honda Civic station wagon but has the larger, 1.6-litre engine from the Honda Accord.

It comes with a comprehensive array of standard equipment and costs \$12,950 for the five-speed manual and \$13,355 for the three-speed semi-automatic version. Power steering, power windows and metallic paint finish are included in the price. Options fitted to the manual test car were air conditioning (\$950) and an electric sunroof (\$830).

BODY: Though the Quintet's appearance is attractive, it doesn't quite match the sleek looks of some other current makes, particularly around the front grille. Also, the body is not very space-efficient for its exterior dimensions. For example, a Ford Laser's body is shorter, yet offers more passenger space.

Body finish is first class in all areas including paint finish, panel fit and interior trim. The doors shut with a good, solid feel. The only blemish in the test car was some creaking about the dash panel over bumps.

Enthusiasts might be disappointed to find none of that rich walnut interior panelling used in bygone Rovers; there's just a strip of simulated timber-grain finish across the dashboard.

Rover Quintet 5-speed manual

ACCELERATION:	
3rd gear 50-80 km/h.....	6.8 sec
3rd gear 60-100 km/h.....	9.5 sec
Through gears 0-80 km/h.....	9.7 sec
Through gears 0-100 km/h.....	15.3 sec
Standing 400 metres.....	19.8 sec

FUEL CONSUMPTION:	
Litres/100 km in city.....	9.7
Litres/100 km on highway.....	8.5
Litres/100 km overall.....	9.1

BRAKING distance from 80 km/h.....	30.8 m
Handbrake stop from 60 km/h.....	56.8 m
PRICE without options at July 6.....	\$12,950
With options as tested.....	\$14,730

ENGINE:	
Cylinders.....	4 OHC



A Rover from Japan

The plastic bumpers wrap around to the wheel arches for good protection against parking scrapes, and side protection strips are fitted. However, there are no mudflaps, allowing mud to splash up easily on the lower body panels. The open-style spoked alloy wheels look attractive but are rather difficult to clean and the front wheels quickly become soiled with brake dust.

ACCOMMODATION: The Quintet is registered to carry five people, but the rear leg and head room is just not enough for adults of average size to be comfortable. In the front, the passenger has reasonable leg room but tall drivers may find their legs cramped under the steering wheel; head room is only fair, and is reduced by the optional sunroof.

Apart from the space restrictions, front seat comfort is very good. The driver's

seat cushion can be raised or lowered and there are adjustments for backrest angle and fore-and-aft seat position. The seats and door trims are covered in plush-looking moquette fabric.

Cargo space is fair; with the rear seat erect, there's just over 800 mm (32 inches) in floor length. By folding all or half of the seat down, this can be increased to about 1475 mm. Access for loading is very good because the high-opening, one-piece hatch door extends almost down to bumper level. The loading lip is a low 680 mm from ground level.

VISIBILITY: Generous glass areas provide the Quintet with good all-round visibility. The side quarter windows behind the rear doors help when parking and reversing.

Safety features include halogen headlamps, intermittent windscreen wiper, night/day rear-view mirror, twin remote adjustable exterior mirrors, band-tinted laminated windscreen and heated rear window with wash/wipe facility.

VENTILATION: The test car's optional air conditioning worked effectively when used for a short evaluation period, as did the flow-through ventilation and heater system.

Electrically operated windows are standard; there's a master control on the driver's door with a safety over-ride lock for the passengers' windows.

INSTRUMENT AND EQUIPMENT: The good, clear instrument panel layout features equal-size tachometer and speedometer with fuel and temperature gauges positioned below. A 16-way warning light system between the two instrument dials includes a graphic display for

doors left open as well as choke, brake, oil-pressure and battery-charge lights, plus a fuel reserve warning light that glows when the reserve is about nine litres.

The sound system is an AM/FM two-speaker radio/cassette of average quality; distortion in the reproduction of base notes was evident in the test car's radio. The quartz clock is a barrel type which clicks over rather noisily each minute.

The smoked-glass electric sunroof is well made and efficient; it has a built-in wind deflector and an internal shade cover. In the event of an electrical failure, it can be closed manually with a tool supplied.

CONTROLS: It's easy to use the controls, which are laid out in a conventional manner and clearly labelled. Twin column stalks operate the wipers, washers, turn signals and lights.

The power-assisted rack-and-pinion steering is speed sensitive — that is, the power assistance diminishes as speed increases. The system has a peculiar feel that takes time to get used to. The steering is firm in the straight-ahead position but there's too much assistance approaching full lock, reducing the self-centring action. Drivers new to the Quintet may find they turn the wheel more than needed when manoeuvring in tight spaces.

ENGINE AND PERFORMANCE: The 1.6-litre overhead camshaft engine is identical to that used in the Accord (even to the Honda name stamped on the cam cover). It's an efficient, smooth-running unit, with good power output and economy for its size.

Cold starts require use of the manual choke, but once warmed up the engine performs well in all conditions. Fuel economy and acceleration times weren't quite as good as for the Honda Accord four-door we tested last year, but the Quintet test car was 60 kg heavier and had air conditioning fitted.

Overall consumption for the Quintet's 500 km test run was 9.1-litres/100 km (31 mpg). The engine compression ratio allows standard petrol to be used. The test car was topped up twice with standard petrol with no noticeable effect on performance.

RIDE AND HANDLING: The fully-independent suspension system of struts and coils and front stabiliser bar also comes from the Accord; the Quintet adds a rear stabiliser bar.

Once you get used to the steering, the Quintet can be driven quite briskly and comfortably, whether on the highway or on winding rural roads. Understeer is moderate and there is minimum torque-steer on acceleration. The test car's

BEST FEATURES
Quality of finish
Performance and economy
Standard equipment

WORST FEATURES
Interior space
Power steering feel
Ride on rough roads

Yokohama steel radials provided good adhesion.

The Quintet rides fairly well on sealed roads but the suspension bottoms easily on corrugations and potholes, causing uncomfortable jolting.

BRAKES: The Quintet has power-assisted front discs and rear drums, with a load-sensitive proportioning valve. Hydraulic brake lines are mounted inside the body to protect them from corrosion and damage.

Maximum brake stops required a higher pedal effort than for the Accord tested, but stopping distances were comparable. Fade tests resulted in an 80 per cent increase in pedal effort but the effort remained within acceptable limits and the car still pulled up satisfactorily.

The handbrake is easy to apply and holds securely on inclines.

TRANSMISSION: The test car's five-speed manual had a smooth, easy change and a precise action. Both fourth and fifth gear ratios are less than one-to-one; at 100 km/h in fifth, the test car's tachometer showed the engine was turning over at only 2600 revs a minute.

SERVICING: Service is due first at 1500 km and thereafter at 12,000 km intervals. More frequent engine oil and filter changes are specified for vehicles operating in severe conditions.

TOWING: Jaguar Rover Australia has specified maximum towing weights of 600 kg for a trailer with brakes and 300 kg for a trailer without brakes. The tow ball load should be between 20 and 30 kg.

SUMMARY: Though Rover purists may recoil at the thought of their new Quintet being made in Japan, they're sure to be happy with the high-quality finish that Japanese car manufacturers are so good at achieving.

Because of its restricted interior space, the Quintet is not suitable for larger families. But for a couple with small children, or as personalised transport with a slightly up-market appeal, it offers good comfort, excellent finish and comprehensive equipment. As well as being economical, the Quintet has good performance and is easy to drive and handle.

• Test car courtesy of Jaguar Rover Australia.