
Family Values

26 October 2005 | Classic Driver



For those who've really 'made it' there's always a terrible dilemma. How to spend that massive salary with a degree of class and style? And after the British hand-made shirts, Swiss watches and Danish designer furniture what is the most suitable car? It must be neither too 'posh' nor 'flash', but with the optimum presence and the most enjoyable driving dynamics.



Apart from the usual suspects from the sports car manufacturers, the products from Range Rover have, over the years, become one of the very best status symbols you can buy. Joining the ranks of the company's upmarket products is a youngster. Like many of the sons and daughters of the 'ancien regime' that bought its predecessors, the Range Rover Sport is young, cosmopolitan, and a little bit 'jet set'. Classic Driver joined them (metaphorically) with a test of the young pretender on the mudflats of North Germany .



The Sport is the fifth model in the company's line-up, and it appears to be the first one that has seen the inside of a wind tunnel. For years the big car in the range had determinedly stuck to its brick-like profile that defied good cw-values. The new Sport has a strongly raked windscreen, large air intakes, flared wheel arches and a duck-tail spoiler that's almost sinful. In aerodynamic terms it appears better even than the rounded Porsche Cayenne.



And it's not only on the outside that the Range Rover Sport is different from its parents. Inside the car, instead of the traditional 'Barbour in the driver's seat, Elgar on the CD, and two gundogs in the boot' trappings of the older cars, the new model is altogether more up to date, and reasonably modestly proportioned in its 4.78 m x 2.17 m dimensions.



A first sit in the car reveals the reason why the Sport is a perfect fusion of luxury saloon and sporty off-roader. The traditionally high driving position is there, and is definitely better than the M-Class and Co, as is the quality cabin fittings of wood, alloy and leather. It is more compact inside, but within careful ergonomic planning the company has achieved a lofty yet intimate atmosphere inside. As usual the split rear boot is present, and it's as practical to rest a brace of pheasants on it as it is bags from Harvey Nicholls.



From a technical standpoint the car is based on the platform of the new Discovery. Our test car was equipped with a 299 HP, 4.4 Litre V8 with 6-speed gearbox. This will accelerate the 2.5 ton vehicle strongly along our chosen north-bound autobahn to a maximum of 225 kph. The air suspension cushions the bumps well, and we considered the advantages of the 390 HP supercharged version, but quickly decided the 20 litre/100 kilometre consumption of our car was enough. In any case, it was a relaxed cruise to the coast.



In the distance it took to go from the sand dunes to the wet beach the car immediately impresses. If the speed-related steering was soft and comfortable on the autobahn, driving it off road means every

little driving input could be felt, and the car was eager to respond to the slightest instruction. With its true Land Rover genes (and modern technical assistance like Terrain Response, taken from the Discovery) the car is a 100% true off-roader. Five different programmes are available from the Terrain Response menu, and they will control the traction assistance, self-levelling, engine-torque and transmission dynamics. For real downhill motoring there is the well-known Hill Descent as well. Lifestyle SUVs from VW, Mercedes and Volvo take note – you won't compete with this guy.



So the new Range Rover Sport handles superbly over the ditches and dunes of the North German coast. That much you would expect from a car that bears the legendary Land Rover badge, a mark of the ultimate cross-country ability. No other Range Rover has been so cultivated. But a quick twist on the steering wheel, and a click for the dampers to be set harder, and the sports car in the Sport can soon be woken up.



It is nice to come to the conclusion that Range Rover has a true 'junior' model in their ranks. It has all round capabilities but is no 'jack of all trades', it's smaller than previous cars but not small enough to be just for show. Can we recommend an Aston Martin V8 Vantage to be its companion in the perfect garage? In Tungsten Grey and brown leather interior the Aston would complement the Sport very well. True blue and with pedigree, but perfect for the young master or mistress about town.

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