

CLASSIC DRIVER



Driven: Classic Range Rover

22 December 2011 | Classic Driver



While the world has been rightly celebrating 50 years of the Jaguar E-type, I would suggest that the champagne should be ordered well in advance to toast another British design classic: the original three-door Range Rover, promoted as a 'car for all reasons' at its early 70s launch.

At Land Rover's [recent Eastnor Castle event](#), I had the briefest of drives in what must be one of the finest examples of an early (1971) car, beautifully presented in Lincoln Green and in the hands of just its third owner from new.

With only 52,000 miles on the clock, and in such superb – actually **unrestored** – condition, we kept the route to private parkland roads. My last extended experience of an original RR was a 1979 camping holiday in Ireland, and this car felt as good, if not better than the mustard-coloured estate

that was our transport over thirty years ago.



As with the E-type, the styling was so perfect at the time that subsequent versions failed to capture the wonderful proportions of the original: the high windscreen, the bluff, yet never 'boxy' sides, the characteristic, slightly rearward-sloping stance when parked.

Inside, the vinyl upholstery shows a little cracking here and there but is generally in fine condition. It's interesting to consider, surveying the expanses of simple rubber and vinyl flooring and seat-covering in this example, how different the modern cars are in their devotion to sybaritic luxury.



Yet, when launched, the Range Rover was always billed as a premium (£2,000 or so, at launch) model with the "comfort of a luxury saloon, the road-holding of a high-performance car, the capacity of an estate and the go-anywhere capability of a Land Rover". Its early advertising abounds with grainy images of towed boats, black-tie hunt balls in deepest Leicestershire and shooting parties.

On the road, the Buick-based V8 still pulls well. Shifting the gear-lever is easy, although less precise than we would accept nowadays, while the brakes and steering seem perfectly adequate for driving in 2012. Indeed, the owner has taken the car on long trips in recent years: to Le Mans, for example. It rolls a touch, 'tis true, but with a smooth driving technique and careful reading of the road ahead this can be kept under control.



The petrol consumption hasn't changed from my holiday-time days, three-up on the lanes of Southern Ireland. It is pretty ruinous, and testing its 100mph+ capability will empty the tank at an alarming rate.

I've never really liked the four-door version, and have always found an automatic anaemic, to say the least. No, the original, classic three-door manual in non-metallic paintwork is without doubt the finest, truly meriting the marketing department's strapline of 'motoring in a new dimension'. And this Lincoln Green car is one of the best out there.

With grateful thanks to both Land Rover and the owner of this wonderful car

Text: [Steve Wakefield](#)

Photos: Land Rover / Peter Robain

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