BARRY COOKE RE-APPRAISES THE CAR READERS WANT MOST

THE BEST OF THEM ALL?

THE Rover 2000 was the only model to win more than one award in **Modern Motor's** Readers' Poll, results of which were announced last month. It took out the best luxury compact title, then slid home a convincing winner in the major Best All-Rounder category.

In this latter section we'd asked readers to nominate the one model they'd choose, irrespective of price, to fulfil the tasks of family outings, holiday touring, personal enjoyment driving, and everyday transport.

Does the Rover really fill all those bills? Editor Dave Frith and I decided to find out. MM has tested the Rover previously (June, 1965

modern MOTOR ROAD REPORT

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REAL cow on the seats; real sheep on the floor; real tree on the dash: Rover interior shows its breeding.

issue), but we decided to refresh our impressions and after only several days' fast talking managed to ease one from the loving grasp of Sydney's Grenville Motors.

Some 500 miles later, after a drive through the Blue Mountains of N.S.W., and out on to the historic gold plains around Bathurst and Sofala, we were pretty well convinced: **Modern Motor** readers are right.

My own view is that the Rover is one of the best half-dozen cars I've driven.

In the mountains it was wet and misty; around Sofala it was hot, dry, and stony; throughout the roads were winding; but the Rover 2000 was never wrong-footed, never caused anxiety of any sort to driver or passenger, was exceptionally comfortable, and surprisingly economical.

It is, without a doubt, one of the best things to come from the British motor industry — ah, blow it, ANY industry.

The Rover's real strength lies in its over-the-road ability — ability to gobble up the miles without apparent effort. It's not a particularly powerful car, consequently its acceleration isn't anything out of the box. Ninety brake horsepower towing a weight of 24.5cwt. isn't an altogether favorable power/weight ratio.

But once the car gets moving, its handling is such that it doesn't have to ease off for corners as much as other cars.

Editor Frith at wheel of Rover in Blue Mountains. Barry Cooke's pictures.

As a result, the overall impression is one of rare effortlessness.

The Lancia Flavia Zagato Coupe which we drove and wrote about in **Modern Motor** recently left a similar impression.

Pushing the Rover along the narrow, winding, undulating roads that characterise the N.S.W. countryside is sheer pleasure. The ride is level, beautifully controlled, and free from fore-and-aft pitch. The servo-assisted four-wheel discs respond faithfully and sensitively. The assistance is mild by all standards, requiring a strong push for heavy stops, though light stops are no effort.

The gearbox of the car we drove was stiff — probably because it had done less than 1000 miles, obviating any possibility of performance figures. The ratios are widely spaced, too, and high, the most obvious gap being between second and third.

However, this was only an embarrassment on a couple of very tight uphill corners, where we were wishing both for more power and a slightly higher second gear. The fact that the motor, being new, was still stiff, added to the Rover's discomfort in these few corners.

The gearlever is very short — no more than five inches — and this in itself makes gearchanging more effort. Despite the shortness, the lever is well-located, with a lift-up tab integral with the rubber

THICK seats are soft but not saggy; they recline but lack head rest; rear lacks good knee-room.

gaiter locking out reverse until required.

The clutch is not light in operation, but it bites strongly and progressively, without slip.

The steering is worm and roller, with 3¾ turns from lock to lock. Some testers have commented that this is too indirect, but I'm inclined to think it's a pretty good compromise.

At backing and filling speeds the steering is already heavy. If the ratio were any more direct it might be excessively stiff.

At any speed above 10 or 15 mph it is very good, though, combining a nicely balanced degree of "feel" with ready response. Only on very rough surfaces is there any "feedback" and this is of a very well-damped variety. Even so, the Rover will track perfectly without more than the lightest of guiding hands on the wheel.

Performance is something we weren't able to measure because of the car's newness. However, it will certainly top the "ton," thanks to a tall final drive ratio of 3.54 to 1, and a shape that gives the impression of good wind penetrating properties.

The road test **Modern Motor** published back in June, 1965, was done on one of the early cars that differed somewhat from current production models, and it ran a standing quarter in the middle 19s and accelerated to 50 in about 10 seconds.

I feel that the Rover would be a better car with more power. In its present stage of tune, however, there's a very nice balance between power and roadability.

The 2000 TC (twin carburettor) which we haven't seen here yet has 115 bhp and a compression ratio of 10 to 1. It's won rave reviews overseas, so maybe it's the answer.

Although the Rover 2000's styling and mechanical specifications constituted a major breakaway for the Rover Co. when the car was introduced about three years ago, the luxury interior is very much in the old company's traditions.

Interior

The 2000 is really a four-seater. There are four superbly upholstered places, and although the rear seat is made into a bench by the inclusion of a padded section between the two rear sections, the individual who sits there would be comfortable.

English hide is used throughout. The test car was a good dark red outside, with dark brown upholstery and black vinyl trim on dash.

The overall picture was one of typically restrained English luxury.

Further embellishment in the form of oiled walnut panels on dash and door sills added another luxury touch. The interior is the best I've ever seen — a triumph (sorry!) of automotive decor.

Headlining is plastic, patterned to look suitably tweedy, and thus combining a look of the "old school" with the practicality demanded by today's car owners.

Carpeting was a mid-brown, good-quality pile, beautifully tailored to fit all the corners and cover all the bumps. It's bound around the edges and firmly attached to the floors.

Instrumentation is shamefully basic in a car of this class. There's a strip speedo flanked by heat and fuel gauges. Warning lights do the rest. Oh, yes, there's an electric clock, too, mounted dead centre of the dash. Every 2½ minutes it gives a faint "bonk" as the spring is electrically rewound.

If the instrumentation is basic and only sparsely calibrated, the control toggles are clearly marked, logically enough arranged, and precise in their action.

The various toggle switches are shaped like miniature umbrella handles, so that the fingers engage more definitely and the toggles themselves don't spear passengers thrown against the dash in accidents.

Headlight flashers and high and low beam selector is a wand on the left-hand side of steering column. Opposite, there's a wand that controls turn flashers and blows the horn.

The arrangement is first-class ergonomically and doesn't involve the driver in any unnecessary contortions.

A radio of exceptional clarity is fitted.

Seating can be adjusted to suit everybody. Squab rake adjustments are effected by lifting a very easily operated lever on the inside of each front seat. As the tension comes off

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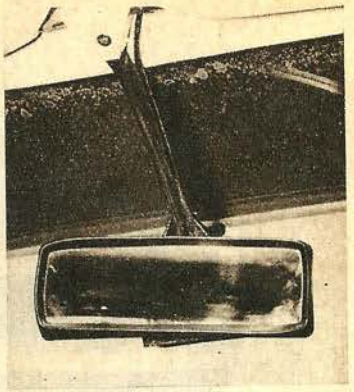

the individual just leans back or forward as dictated by his preference. The seat back follows. When the adjustment is perfect, the lever is fully depressed and the seat locked in position.

Like all fully reclining seats, they are pretty useless for sleeping because there isn't anywhere to rest the head. It's all very nice to be able to rack the seat down, but it's no fun having to support the head with the muscles of the neck and nothing else.

Armrests are fitted to all doors, there's a fold down centre armrest in back, and, as you would expect, ash-trays front and back, plus a lighter.

With seat belts fastened, third gear is a long reach for the driver who likes his seat well back, and the window winder is completely out of reach.

The fresh air, heating and blowing system is complex, and, I'm sure, very efficient in English conditions.

West of the Divide in N.S.W. on a summer day, despite the personalised dashboard air vents, we found ourselves wishing for something better, eventually falling back on the swivelling quarter vents.

These are minor complaints. The thing that jarred most in an otherwise harmonious interior was the convex rear view mirror. It gives a completely distorted view of the traffic behind, and can lull the driver into believing the traffic is

(Continued on page 81)

***TOP:** One thing we didn't like about the Rover — convex rear vision mirror which reduces and distorts the image.*

***CENTRE:** Padded storage bins (left) are handy, neat, and good safety feature. Overhead cam four (right), looks stirring.*

***BOTTOM:** One of the most civilised boots in the business.*
***ABOVE LEFT:** Coffee break near Sofala, N.S.W., for Frith.*

BEST OF ALL?

(Continued from page 31)

some distance back, when in fact it is quite close. For a car as safety-oriented as the Rover, it's a strange inclusion.

There are, nevertheless, fewer sources of annoyance or inconvenience inside the Rover 2000 than most other cars.

Stepping outside for a moment, the boot is surprisingly generous, with the spare wheel mounted upright.

Under-bonnet accessibility is good, although we advise the Rover owner to roll his sleeves up before diving in. The bonnet is not self-supporting. One of those old-fashioned articulated rods is used.

The motor itself is pretty to look at — if, like us, you're something of a motor perve. A lot of alloy is evident, which always helps the look of things. The head is aluminium.

It is a single overhead camshaft unit of 1978c.c. Dead square at 85.7 by 85.7mm., it runs on a compression ratio of 9 to 1, produces 90 bhp at 5000 and 113.5ft./lb. of torque at 2750.

One SU carbie is used — a 1½-incher.

An 8½in. diaphragm spring clutch couples to the all-synchro four-speed gearbox already mentioned. All the ratios are fairly high, which makes for effortless touring but modest off-the-mark performance.

The Rover's suspension is its real strength — the one factor that puts its handling in the top class.

The front suspension is a sophisticated adaption of the MacPherson strut system with the coil springs attached horizontally against the cowl. The rear suspension is a remarkable variation of the de Dion theme with splines on the tube itself, eliminating any tendency for the splines to bind under torsion.

At the rear, the disc brakes are carried inboard, thereby reducing unsprung weight, and in this case improving brake cooling.

This advanced suspension is attached to an equally advanced body which combines some elements of unit construction with a separate chassis. The body, doors, and deck lids are bolted on to a skeleton body which is also the superstructure of a monocoque chassis.

This makes for great strength and rigidity. We like that.

As we said before the 2000 is very close to the summit. •