ROVER 2000, 2000TC, 3500 and SD1

From 1965 – 1981

Rover 2000 TC (for twin carburettor) came with the smaller of the two engine options available in this body shape. Was discontinued in August 1973 after more than six years on the Australian market.

Conservative class

FOR SOME crazy, unfounded reason Rovers still have a reputation for being a breed of car best suited to people such as retired army colonels, and staid grey haired executives from St Ives or Toorak.

This undeserved reputation as a dull car is a legacy of those days, 20 or more years ago, when Rover was a conservative company building conservative cars for conservative buyers. A few tank-like Rover 3.0-litre and 3.5-litre cars still wander around Australian cities — usually at low speeds in the high speed lane — but these cars reached their swansong in the 1960s when they were superseded by sophisticated, high-speed sports sedans more suited to the young executive in a hurry, than to the old executive who has long since arrived.

As further proof of how innovative the Rover company has become in the last 20-odd years consider some of the enormous variety of products it has built in that time. The Land Rover has been in use for over 30 years but it was only fairly recently that other car builders realised the market need for a combined workhorse and family station wagon. The Range Rover is still the only prestige four-wheel-drive vehicle on the world market.

What other car manufacturer has raced gas turbine cars in the Le Mans 24 Hour race, built road-going cars with turbine engines, and finished in the top six in the Monte Carlo Rally?

Rovers conservative? Far from it!

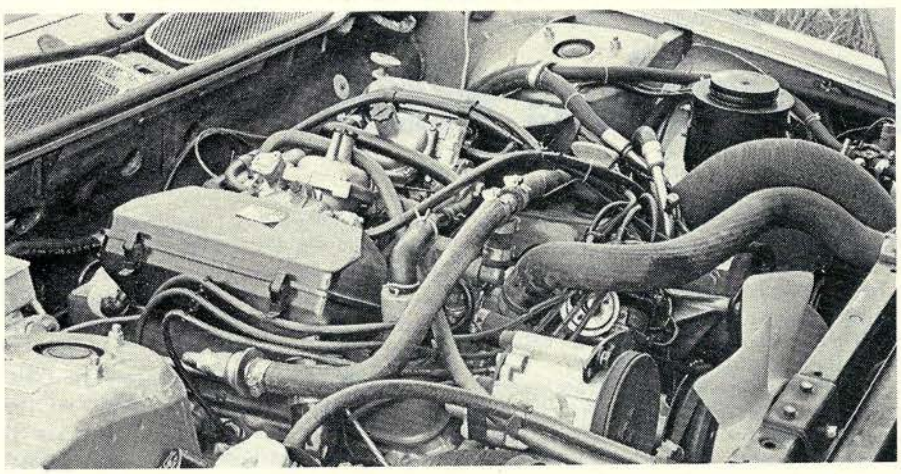
The Rover cars featured here are smooth, purposeful, high-performance vehicles that provide much driving pleasure. The Rover 2000 was a "safety" car back when Volvo and Mercedes-Benz were the only other manufacturers interested not only in building cars able to avoid an accident, but also in being able to protect their passengers should an accident become unavoidable.

Oddly enough for a prestige car, the Rover 2000 has only a four-cylinder engine and is strictly a four-seater — the two back seats are contoured to give a very comfortable ride for two occupants, but a third rear passenger would need a strange-shaped rear end to fit into the centre space!

Despite its four-cylinder engine the 2000 performs well, and the 2000 TC with its twin carburettor really flies. With the 3500 alloy V8 engine fitted, the light-bodied early Rover's performance (the body is coded P6) has to be felt to be believed.

The bigger-bodied SD1 (for Specialist Division product one of British Leyland) cars aren't such fliers but are far from being sluggish. Incidentally, it is likely that we will only see the V8 versions of the SD1 in this country as import duty on fully imported cars would make the "cheaper" six-cylinder SD1 2300 and 2600 pretty expensive in Australia.

A very complex motor car, the P6 Rover 2000/3500 features an unusual front suspension set-up, designed to make room for the bulky stillborn gas turbine engine, a de Dion rear suspension to isolate the wheels from the



Top to bottom: the 3528 cc Rover 3500 (1969-1978); Rover SD1 — Car of the Year in Britain at the time of its launch; alloy 3.5-litre V8 engine is actually a Buick derivative, delivers 102 smooth kilowatts in SD1 version; Rover has always been up-market . . . this is the luxurious interior of the 1970 model 3500.

differential unit and four-wheel discs to give the ultimate in stopping power.

These complexities make repairs to the P6 cars time consuming and therefore expensive so when looking at an older used car — and the last 200s were sold in Australia in 1973 — scrutinise its mechanical condition closely before purchase.

Much simpler than its predecessor, the Rover SD1's front suspension is plain MacPherson strut, while a well-located beam axle is used at the rear end and, most surprisingly of all, the four-wheel disc set-up was replaced by a more conventional front disc/rear drum system.

But this apparent simplicity of design belies the sophisticated computer time put into positioning each component in exactly the right position. Sophisticated simplicity makes plain, comparatively inexpensive mechanicals do the work which previously required complex components.

History

THE HISTORY of the Rover can be traced way back to the 1890s when the Rover Cycle Company mass produced bicycles (at the time bikes were the only form of reasonably-priced wheeled transport available — as are cars today).

After experimenting with motorised bicycles, in 1904 the company built its first car, a single-cylinder eight-horsepower model.

Years of making "traditional" British saloons in the style of Daimler, Jaguar, Wolesley etc, were finally abandoned when Rover decided in the late 1950's to change direction and build high performance sedans.

The Rover 2000 was released in Britain in 1963 and first reached Australia in 1965, becoming an instant success as it appealed to drivers looking for a combination of quality, style and performance — not to mention that new word in motoring — safety.

An interesting feature of this new car was its ability to carry the spare wheel on the outside of the bootlid, thus increasing the luggage area. Inside the boot you can mount the spare on the boot floor or vertically to one side of the boot — depending on the sort of load being carried.

In 1967, Australia saw the introduction of the twin carburettor 2000 TC and two years later, in June 1969, the quickest Rover of them all, the Rover 3500, with its all alloy V8 engine, appeared.

Minor facelifts made to the 2000s in 1970, 1971 and 1972 did not alter the car's basic appearance. It was withdrawn from Australia late in 1973 in favour of the 3500.

In the European market, the Rover 2000 later became the 2200 and remained on sale until 1976.

A facelift dramatised the 3500's appearance. The most noticeable feature is a big V8 badge in the front grille, but otherwise the car remained unchanged in looks until it was replaced by the new SD1 3500 in December 1978 (a few old 3500s were sold new at the beginning of 1979 as stocks were cleared).

Between 1972 and 1975 a special model, the Rover 3500S only available with manual transmission, was sold and it went extremely well.

December 1978 saw the new big five-door hatchback — the SD1 — released in Australia. Featuring a totally new body and mechanical layout it was a gamble for the Rover company.

No one else had built a big prestige car with a hatchback body and there was a risk that buyers who could afford this type of car would be too conservative to like its modern styling.

Fortunately the gamble paid off and the car was an immediate success here as it had been in other countries.

In March 1980, a five-speed manual transmission became available as an option on the SD1 but, apart from that, the car has remained unchanged since its release.

Model Range

ALL OF the cars featured here come well equipped and in the Rover tradition, with craftsman-like luxury standards.

The interior of the cabin and the boot are fitted with top quality carpet, while individual front seats recline and are usually fitted with leather coverings, although some did well with lower cost, but still good, vinyl.

Many Rover 2000TCs have wire wheels and all have a tachometer, while the 3500S has a standard vinyl roof (available as an option on the 3500).

All SD1 Rovers have air conditioning as standard and offer a choice between fully-integrated air or, at a lower cost, a hang-on semi-integrated air.

Body Types

NO OPTIONAL bodies are offered in any of these cars. The P6 is only available as a four-door saloon while all SD1s are four-door saloons with a large rear hatch and a rear seat which folds down to increase the luggage capacity. A wagon SD1 has been rumoured but as yet there are no signs of it.

Mechanical

IN AUSTRALIA we have only seen a limited number of engine/transmission options in the Rover P6 and SD1. Fortunately the versions released here have all been the best ones.

On the European market, the P6 has been sold with the 2000 motor seen here and also with a bored-out 2200 engine, available since 1973. In Australia the 2000 was discontinued in 1973, leaving only the 3500 unit.

The SD1 sells on other markets with a choice of 2300 or 2600 six-cylinder engines but only the big alloy 3500 V8 appeared in Australia.

The 2000 was sold with a choice of a four-speed manual transmission or a three-speed automatic up until 1971, when the manual was dispensed with. The 2000TC, sold from 1967 to 1973, was limited to the four-speed manual gearbox.

The P6 3500 was released as an automatic whereas the P6 3500S was sold only in manual form.

Early SD1 cars were all automatics, but from March 1980 a five-speed manual became available as an option. The four-speed manual, sold with the SD1 overseas, is not employed in this country.

Problem Areas

P6 (Rover 2000, 3500): Look for rust in the top rear corners of the front guards and in the top front corners of the rear guards. Also check the lower edges of the rear guards and in the door bottoms.

Slight clutch shudder is not unusual but if the shudder is bad be very careful because repairs are expensive.

Although both engines are long lasting and reliable they are again costly to repair so check the engine condition. Look for smoke from the exhaust and oil fumes from the engine breather.

The 2000 motor, particularly in twin-carburetted, 2000TC form, is susceptible to out-of-tune problems so sluggish performance may not necessarily mean serious troubles.

SD1 (1978 onwards): Rust can be a problem in some early cars; look at the door bottoms, door sills, body seams, around the rear lights, behind the rear wheels and in the tops of the front suspension housings.

Stone chips in the sloping down front edge of the bonnet may also lead to rust.

Look for water leaks around the rear hatch, for water stains in the luggage area, and for water in the spare wheel well.

Manual gearboxes are often heavy to use, and the synchromesh can be slow when the gearbox is cold.

To avoid expensive repairs it pays to know exactly what is wrong with the car before buying so an inspection by an engineer from your local motoring association is virtually essential.

The release of the Rover SD1 marked a radical departure away from conservative styling. It was the marque's first hatchback design.

Insurance

INSURANCE premiums are fairly high for all the Rovers under scrutiny here which is hardly surprising considering the potential performance of the cars and the high cost of body and mechanical parts.

Interestingly, most insurance companies list all versions of the car in the same category so, all things being equal, the cost of insuring a four-cylinder automatic is no different from the cost for a V8 five-speed manual.

Summing Up

THE ROVER 2000, 2000TC, 3500, 3500S, and SD1 are all refined, high performance cars which are a pleasure to drive and to ride in.

They provide a nice compromise between performance, luxury and prestige and will appeal to the motorist who wants something a bit better than average but who is unwilling (or unable) to pay an exhorbitant price.

Repairs and maintenance are expensive so be very sure of a car before purchase. □

NEXT MONTH
Mitsubishi Sigma 1977-1981.

WHAT YOUR MONEY WILL BUY

	2000 auto	2000TC manual	3500 auto	SD1 auto
$1500-2000	1965-1968	1967	–	–
$2000-2500	1969-1970	1968-1969	–	–
$2500-3000	1971	1970	1969	–
$3000-3500	1971-1972	1971-1972	1970	–
$3500-4000	1973	1973	1971-1972	–
$4000-5000	–	–	1973	–
$5000-6000	–	–	1974	–
$6000-7000	–	–	1975	–
$7000-8000	–	–	1976	–
$8000-9000	–	–	1977-1978	–
$9000-10,000	–	–	1979	–
$14,000-15,000	–	–	–	1979
$15,000-16,000	–	–	–	1981
$16,000-17,000	–	–	–	1981