RANGE ROVER

The 4WD star — despite flaws

By Bob Hudson, MIAME

For 12 years the Range Rover has been the yardstick by which other four-wheel-drive vehicles are judged. Its off-road ability and ride comfort in rough conditions are second-to-none.

However, as good as the Range Rover is, there's room for improvement in some areas. For example, the gear-change is still notchy and truck-like in its operation and the transfer lever is not easy to use. The layout of the instrument panel and the driver controls could also be improved.

The power steering provides excellent damping against rough road shocks but it's too vague in the straight-ahead position.

The introduction of four doors enhances the Range Rover's appeal, but at $24,600 plus on-road costs, it's certainly not within everyone's reach. Specify air conditioning, metallic paint and cloth seats and you're up for another $1815. Automatic transmission can be ordered through dealers for $3350.

Assembly of the previously imported Range Rover is now undertaken at Leyland's Enfield (Sydney) plant.

BODY: Four doors have been adapted to the Range Rover body without any increase in wheelbase or overall length. The front doors were shortened and the rear seat moved backwards by 89 mm (about 3.5 inches) to allow easier access. Four-door styling looks so right on the Range Rover you wonder why Leyland took so long to introduce it — perhaps it's because demand for the two-door model has nearly always outstripped supply.

Dust entry through the two-piece tailgate detracted from an otherwise good standard of finish in the test vehicle. The upper tailgate was also difficult to open.

ACCOMMODATION: With fully carpeted floor and optional cloth-covered seats, the interior trim looks plush. Ample space is provided for all five occupants; the centre rear passenger has leg room to spare because of the space between the two front seats.

Seat comfort is generally good, but the front seat cushions are a little short for long-legged people and the backrest angle is not adjustable. The front seat belts are anchored within the back rests and, for tall people, they pull down uncomfortably over the shoulder.

Minor irritating features are that the rear door arm rests are too far forward to be of any use other than as door pulls, and the rear window winder handles are set too low under the arm rests.

Folding the rear seat down increases the cargo length by almost 50 per cent from 1000 mm to 1450 mm (nearly 5 ft), but the front seats can't be set right back when the rear seat is folded. Overall, the cargo space is good, but it's slightly less than in the Holden Jackaroo. The spare wheel is mounted inside the vehicle over the left-hand wheel arch.

VISIBILITY: Occupants sit high and, with the low body waistline and large glass areas all round, have an excellent view in all directions. The rear hatch glass is heated for demisting and, thankfully, is equipped with a wiper/washer to clear away dust and mud.

VENTILATION: A good supply of air is available when on the move, though the ventilation controls are difficult to reach; the temperature control lever can't be seen from the driver's seat.

INSTRUMENTS AND EQUIPMENT: There's a good range of instruments and meters but no tachometer. The fascia layout has changed little over the years, with the speedo and fuel and water temperature gauges housed in a small binnacle on top of the dash panel, and the circular dials for oil pressure, oil temperature, volt meter and clock tucked away down low in the dash where they aren't easy to see or monitor.

The ignition lock, fitted low on the right-hand side of the steering column, is somewhat hidden from the driver's view and is difficult to find in the dark. The horn button is on the end of a column stalk; it would be easier to find if it were on the steering wheel. Also on a critical note, the turn indicator audio signal is not loud enough.

A high-quality Pioneer AM/FM stereo/cassette system is standard.

ENGINE AND PERFORMANCE: A new higher-compression engine, with revised camshaft timing, has been introduced with the four-door model. These revisions, along with higher overall transmission ratios, are aimed mainly at better fuel economy.

Maximum power output has dropped slightly but it's produced at a full thousand engine revs below the previous model. The new engine has slightly more torque; it's produced at the same low engine speed as before — 2500 revs.

With the higher transmission ratios, the Range Rover doesn't produce lively acceleration times, but the V8 engine lopes along easily at touring speeds, consuming the kilometres with deceptive ease. The engine's excellent low-speed torque really shines through when using a low range in four-wheel-drive conditions.

Overall fuel consumption over the standard NRMA road test course (excluding the four-wheel-drive tests) worked out at 15.3 litres/100 km (18.4 mpg).

OFF-ROAD PERFORMANCE: When the going gets tough, the Range Rover really excels. It's capable of tackling the roughest conditions, but what really impresses is the ease with which it handles them. The supple, long-travel suspension soaks up bumps so well you'd hardly think you'd left the highway, and the power steering does an exceptional job of damping-out road shocks and wheel "kickback".

In low range, the V8 engine has enough power for the Range Rover to idle over obstacles. Lowest overall ratio is an incredible 48 to 1.

The Range Rover's heavy weight demands care in sand or boggy conditions to avoid digging in, but in all other four-wheel-drive situations there are few, if any, vehicles that can match it.

RIDE AND HANDLING: The all-coil-spring suspension has a Panhard rod and radius arms at the front and radius arms, A-frame location arms and a self-levelling device at the rear.

The suspension allows a lot of body roll which at first is disconcerting, but you quickly become accustomed to it. Michelin X "mud and snow" radials are standard; they're noisy at low speeds but provide good grip and handling.

Unlike some four-wheel-drives with their compromise spring settings and harsh rides, the Range Rover gives an excellent ride in all conditions. Occupants are very well insulated from what's going on underneath the vehicle.

BRAKES: The four-wheel disc brakes give a good stopping performance by pulling the heavy Range Rover up in a relatively short distance with only moderate pedal effort. But they didn't show up well in fade tests, when the pedal effort doubled after seven repeated emergency stops from 80 km/h.

The handbrake works on a drum fixed to the rear tailshaft and is not suitable for use as an emergency brake, due to excessive shudder that occurs when it's applied while the vehicle is moving. It holds satisfactorily for parking.

TRANSMISSION: The four-speed all-synchromesh gearbox is a disappointment in that it still has a notchy engagement and excessive backlash. The transfer lever positions — high range, low range and neutral (for power take-off) — are rather vague and the lever in the test vehicle was stiff to operate.

As in all previous Range Rovers, four-wheel-drive is permanently engaged. A floor-mounted control knob locks the transfer case differential should loss of wheel traction occur, and a warning light on the fascia panel illuminates while the lock is engaged.

SERVICING: After the first service at 1600 km, the maintenance schedule lists services at 5000 km intervals. There's room in the engine bay for ready access to most items, though the air cleaner — situated between the carburettors — could be awkward to service.

TOWING: The owner's handbook contains a table of maximum recommended towing loads for the Range Rover but some of these would be illegal in NSW. There's a State regulation that the laden weight of a trailer drawn by this type of vehicle must not exceed two-thirds the aggregate weight of the hauling vehicle by more than 10 per cent.

For the Range Rover, this translates into a maximum legal towing load of about 1840 kg, equivalent to a caravan with a maximum length of about 6.7 metres (22 feet), plus personal effects. A dual horse float laden would also come within the recommended maximum. With the power available, the Range Rover should have no difficulty towing up to the legal limit.

SUMMARY: The Range Rover is expensive, but what other four-wheel-drives can offer a more convincing performance either on or off road and, at the same time, provide such a high degree of comfort for the driver and occupants?

Four doors add a new dimension to the Range Rover's practical design and will help to ensure the model's continued popularity.

• **Test vehicle by courtesy of Leyland Australia.**

BEST FEATURES:
Off-road capability
Comfort and ride
Passenger space

WORST FEATURES:
Gearchange quality
Transmission backlash
Steering vagueness

Range Rover four-door manual

ACCELERATION:	
3rd gear 50-80 km/h	7.2 sec
3rd gear 60-100 km/h	10.3 sec
Through gears 0-80 km/h	11.8 sec
Through gears 0-100 km/h	19.4 sec
Standing 400 metres	21.2 sec
FUEL CONSUMPTION:	
Litres/100 km in city	23.0
Litres/100 km on highway	13.8
Litres/100 km overall	15.3
BRAKING distance from 80 km/h	34.6 m
Handbrake stop from 60 km/h	—
PRICE without options at Jan. 18	$24,600
With options as tested	$25,730
ENGINE:	
Cylinders	V8
Capacity in litres	3.528
Compression ratio to 1	9.35
Maximum net power at 4000 r/min	92.5 kW
Maximum torque at 2500 r/min	258 Nm
Fuel grade specified	Super

DIMENSIONS:	
Mass	1880 kg
Length	4470 mm
Width	1780 mm
Height	1780 mm
Ground clearance	204 mm
Turning circle	11.4 m
Turns lock-to-lock	3.5
Fuel capacity in litres	82
NRMA Insurance points rating (on 0 to 26 scale)	5

CONVERSION FACTORS: To convert metric units to imperial, multiply by this figure: km (kilometres) to miles, 0.62 (also for km/h to mph); m (metres) to feet, 3.28; mm (millimetres) to inches, 0.04; kg (kilograms) to cwt, 0.02; litres to gallons 0.22; kW (kilowatts) to bhp, 1.34; Nm (newton metres) to lb ft, 0.74. To find mpg, divide litres/100 km figure into 282. Prices quoted include sales tax but not registration, dealer charges or insurance.