

TALL IN THE SADDLE

Unlike some manufacturers, who seem to offer one lineup in very similar form, other than small-medium-large or sedan-coupe-wagon variations, Land Rover as a brand has never confused things much: there are the Land Rovers themselves, smaller and more rugged in demeanor, and the Range Rovers, mostly larger and emoting a high level of luxury. Make no mistake—every Land Rover and every Range Rover is ready for rugged duty, while simultaneously luxurious. Spinning off the prior Discovery and LR3, the Land Rover LR4 has always carried the solid DNA of its high-end Range Rover cousins, yet—as evidenced by its carrying the Land Rover rather than Range Rover name—marches to a somewhat more utilitarian beat. The LR4 shares the Land Rover marque with only the LR2, a monocoque-chassis compact SUV, but its basic engineering, features and capabilities more closely with the midsize Range Rover Sport,

introduced in 2005 (also reviewed in this issue). The Land Rover and Range Rover offerings thus cross over more than they used to: in the mid-size SUV market, the Land Rover LR4 and Range Rover Sport are closely enough related that any purchase decision may come down to personal taste in style and shape, specific needs for backseat headroom, or perhaps budget. If your needs are more carlike, you might look at either of the outer ends of the lineup: the LR2 or even the rugged full-size Range Rover, though elements of luxury and utility have the widest spread here. It's an intriguing set of options.

FIT FOR A KING

The British royal family visibly loves the Land Rover brand. Mostly loyal to brands with British heritage—Bentley, Rolls-Royce, Jaguar, Aston Martin—Land Rovers and Range Rovers are key to their fox hunting forays and such in the royal hinterlands. Even with most

of those brands now in the hands of the Germans, or India's Tata Motors (in the case of Jaguar and Land Rover since Ford spun them off in 2008), these tough yet luxurious machines maintain their stately air. The Land Rover LR4 is still built at Solihull UK (with additional plants in South Africa and Jordan). Following the pattern of the Discovery 3 (LR3 in the US), the vehicle called LR4 in the US is the Discovery 4 in Britain.

LOGBOOK: INTERIOR

The single most obvious distinguishing physical attribute of the LR4 is its high "alpine roof"—overall and even moreso over the third row. This may make the vehicle appear top-heavy, especially in an age of increasingly low and slick fuel-saving aerodynamics. But one of its benefits is extremely good interior visibility and over-the-shoulder rear view.

We found one interior issue that's a paradox. If you have the driver's seat set back, as we did, the track stands up a good four inches or so tall and a few inches forward, so you could easily trip over it on the way out, and we mean flat-on-your-face tripping. It's a paradox because the tall roof is inviting to an over-six-footer, even wearing a 10-gallon hat. Perhaps the ideal driver is a five-footer with a 30-gallon hat. An owner will want to develop a healthy respect for this detail.

Base model inclusions (see sidebar) make it clear this

is a thoroughly appointed vehicle. Luxuries we missed in our test LR4 were a backup camera and satellite radio.

The information display screen in the upper center of the instrument panel is smaller than most, which is fine in our opinion from a distraction standpoint—simplicity can equal safety, here. Presenting primitive lettering, white on black, and primitive tiny icons to the sides, though, we can't shake the idea that we're looking at a 1978 Space Invaders arcade screen in an iPad world.

On a July day after the LR4 had been sitting in the sun, we found that mirror and window controls located on a flat sill next to the glass make for some very hot adjustments indeed. Keyless start requires pressing the button noticeably longer than is typical, which somewhat works against the convenience factor.

A DO-IT-ALL DRIVER

We start out on surface streets, drive over some bolted steel plates covering road excavation and conclude that the LR4's ride is exceptionally smooth, especially given its off-road capabilities. Specifications (right) describe a high-tech array of brake-related features, and its stopping distance is decent, in the 170-foot-or-so range, but we think the discs could benefit from a larger surface.

Does the LR4 look as though it's going to be a little top-heavy? It does. And is it? It feels a bit so. But we have started out with suspension in Standard mode. The LR4's electronically-controlled air suspension also offers an Off-road mode and an Access mode (which lowers the vehicle a few inches for easier entry and egress). On the road, the air system monitors wheel travel and suspension activity and works to reduce body roll. Though the settings don't include a sport mode, per se, we find the high-centered feeling is reduced as we drive more aggressively. The system's Terrain Response takes it all even farther, handling pavement, dirt, mud and even redrock challenges optimally, through a combination of engine, transmission and suspension feedbacks.

As with ride height, we find freeway-speed tracking does better the more you call up the electronic brainpower—at a normal cruise, we feel some wandering within our lane, but apply a little more power and it goes away.

We didn't have the opportunity to take the LR4 into heavy-duty off-road conditions, but we did get it off the pavement and into some loose gravel, mild ruts, washboard and tight turnarounds. Its turning circle is just over 37 feet, but feels smaller—its relatively short wheelbase helps with the tightest of three-point turns.

Back on the pavement, we hit a run of speed bumps, dips and drainage troughs, and—even in the middle of a 90-degree turn at 35-40 mph—the LR4 tracks very well, and the ride remains firm and comfortable.

A SPECIFIC MARKET

We decided the LR4's position in the utility-to-luxury continuum may deduct what we'll call 10 percent from the luxury end, but adds 30 percent at the utility end. One stumbling point may be fuel economy, at an estimated 12 mpg city and 17 highway, 14 mpg combined.

We found the usual handful of nitpicky details, but put it all together, and your joy of ownership is bound to be pretty high in the Land Rover LR4. Its cost is a third-again higher than the LR2, but in capabilities this is the most affordable Land Rover or Range Rover that's truly rough-ready. Its cost is only about 60 percent that of the big Range Rover. From this standpoint, it has long been worth a good look. With the Range Rover Sport in play, though (see in this issue), you may look twice. That's fine. Again, it may come down to style and taste, as well as third-row headroom, if the cost difference isn't your key. If style and budget are your priorities, but off-road or severe weather capabilities are not, nor interior volume, you may want to wait for the new Range Rover Evoque, starting some \$4500 lower than the LR4. If all this sounds as though there are a lot of things we suggest you look at instead, the point is actually that despite a lot of overlap in the lineup, each vehicle's position is ultimately pretty clear. If the LR4 suits your needs best, the others will fall off your list in some way.

We like the package: plenty of power, decent handling, a comfortable and spacious interior even with that 10-gallon hat. Simple controls (albeit with rudimentary style). All in all, as one of our final logbook entries rhetorically asks, who wouldn't like one of these? ■

SPECIFICATIONS

Our test 2011 Land Rover LR4

ENGINE.....	5.0L DFI V8: 375 hp, 375 lb-ft
TRANSMISSION	6-spd CommandShift auto
DRIVE	Permanent 4WD with traction control
FUEL MILEAGE	(EPA est) 12 city/17 hwy
TIRES/WHEELS:	19" x 8" aluminum alloy wheels, 255/55R 19 tires, temp spare on steel wheel.
BRAKES:	4-wheel power ventilated disc, 4-channel all-terrain ABS, all-terrain DSC, EBD and cornering control, hill descent, emergency brake assist.
SUSPENSION:	4-corner electronic air suspension, auto load leveling. Access, Standard and Off-road modes. Independent front and rear suspension.
SAFETY/SECURITY:	Six-airbag SRS (dual-threshold plus side thorax for driver and front passenger, side-curtain for outboard two rows). Side door impact beams front and rear; child locks; child seat anchors/tethers; rear window defrost; front/rear fog lamps; halogen headlights w/washers; auto-dim rear mirror; rear park distance. Keyless entry and perimeter security, 24-hour recovery service.
COMFORT/CONVENIENCE:	Asymmetrical split tailgate, dual-zone automatic climate control, walnut and leather interior, Bluetooth®, message center, power front seats, power windows, cruise, tilt/slide sunroof plus fixed alpine roof.
AUDIO:	240 watts, 9 speakers, aux input, CD, wheel-mounted controls, glass-mounted multi-antenna.
BASE PRICE	\$ 47,650
Black lacquer finish trim	350
CLIMATE COMFORT PACKAGE:	Heated seats, steering wheel, windshield, washers ...1,500
REAR SEAT & COMFORT PACKAGE:	Third row seat with curtain airbags, split-folding second row, rear climate control, accessory socket and map lamps
California emissions	1,150
Destination charge	100
TOTAL	\$ 51,600

By Joe Sage

