

TOUGH LUX

PRINCE OF THE ROAD : THE FUNDAMENTALS OF THE LAND ROVER LR4 WITH THE SHEETMETAL AND FITMENTS OF THE BIG RANGE ROVER



By Barbara & Bill Schaffer

There are certain vehicles we get to drive that we'd love to just keep in our garage on a more permanent basis. The Range Rover is a perfect example. We do have a little disagreement on which model, however. Barbara's favorite is the top of the line Range Rover because she likes the luxurious appointments, elegant styling and substantial feel, while Bill prefers the Range Rover Sport, which is smaller, sportier and

more agile.

Sadly, we recently had to give back the 2011 Range Rover Sport test vehicle—the week was up and it was time to drive something else. Over the years, we've both had numerous opportunities to drive Range Rovers off-road and found that they are so capable in any kind of terrain. We have experienced climbing giant rocks in the desert, slogging

through foot-deep mud on paths in the jungle and inching over large boulders. Everyday driving challenges like sand, snow, or ice seem mild in comparison, but—extreme or not—Range Rover handles them all with great confidence.

Certainly the driver needs to know how to handle off-road obstacles and conditions, but the neat thing about the Range Rover is how easily it adjusts to best handle each situation. The guts of the



Range Rover command system are conveniently located on the driver-side of the center console just to the rear of the transmission shifter. A large brushed aluminum knob controls the sophisticated Terrain Response™ system that allows the driver to select the appropriate setting for the different conditions. Turning that one knob to one of the five settings tailors the vehicle chassis and powertrain setting to deliver the maximum performance for on or off road.

SPORT: REGULAR OR SUPER

The Range Rover Sport comes in two upscale versions: the anything-but-basic Sport HSE and the Sport Supercharged, priced at \$59,645 and \$74,545 respectively (plus \$850 destination charge). (There is also an HSE LUX, which is basically a pre-optioned HSE, at a base of \$64,345.) Load the Supercharged version up with Autobiography, Climate Comfort, Luxury and Vision Assist packages, throw in adaptive speed control and the rear seat entertainment system, and the price tops out around \$90,000.

Any Sport model has an extensive list of included comfort and convenience features befitting any of the luxury sedans. They also have all the latest technology equipment like navigation, front and rear park distance control, Bluetooth® and a cool interface for off-roading that shows Terrain Response settings including the gear, range and front wheel position.

As great as the Range Rover Sport can be off road, its on-road prowess is equally impressive, but for different reasons. We enjoy driving the Sport around town because of precise steering and a tight 38-foot turning radius. We also like its smooth, responsive power and strong brakes. The Sport is no lightweight, though, tipping the scales at 5,540 pounds, or nearly 300 pounds more than that for the Supercharged model.

An all-aluminum 375-hp, 5.0-liter V8 engine powers the Sport HSE, driving its full-time all-wheel drive through a six-speed automatic transmission. This combination smoothly and silently accelerates from 0 to 60

BRAND POSITIONING AND LOGBOOK NOTES

By Joe Sage

Have you ever been confused by various Land Rover and Range Rover models, all from Land Rover? Use Ford as an example: one lineup carries the corporate name (Ford), then there is a high-end line (Lincoln). The two lineups from corporate Land Rover are similar in that sense (though with a higher expectation of luxury across both).

A growing entry-level luxury market suggested the need for a lower buy-in point to the Range Rover brand. To bridge the gap, the company developed the Range Rover Sport, which looks like the pricey big Range Rover, but has much commonality with the Land Rover LR4—chassis, engine, drivetrain and many other features.

With the Land Rover LR4 at a base price of \$47,650 and the full-size Range Rover HSE at \$78,835, the Range Rover Sport HSE at \$59,645 (add \$850 destination charge to any) brings Range Rover shopping considerably closer to Land Rover turf. Whether Range Rover draws buyers in by style, luxury, prestige or capability, the Range Rover Sport will draw in that many more. (Buyers of the Supercharged versions—the Sport at about \$75k and the big Range Rover at about \$95k—are headed upscale, regardless.)

The Range Rover Sport is an appealing alternative to the big Range Rover on cost savings alone. And it's an appealing alternative to the mechanically similar LR4 on the basis of Range Rover panache. The Range Rover Sport's price is dead center between them by ratio: about 25 percent higher than the LR4 and 25 percent lower



SPECIFICATIONS

Our test 2011 Range Rover Sport HSE

ENGINE	5.0L DFI V8: 375 hp, 375 lb-ft
TRANSMISSION	6-spd CommandShift auto with normal, sport and manual shift modes
DRIVE	Perm 4WD, traction control, 2-spd electronic transfer box, electronic center diff
FUEL MILEAGE	(EPA est) 13 city/18 hwy
TIRES/WHEELS	19" x 8" aluminum alloy wheels, 255/50YR 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, gradient release, hill descent control, 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; front/rear fog lamps; rain- and speed-sensing wiper; automatic xenon headlights w/washers; rear park distance. Keyless entry and perimeter security, retractable/removable rear load-space cover. 24-hour recovery service.
COMFORT/CONVENIENCE	Dual-zone automatic climate control with recirc, leather interior, power adjust steering wheel, Bluetooth®, iPod/USB connectivity, message center, power front seats with memory for seats-wheel-mirrors, power windows, heated folding power mirrors, electrochromatic rear-view mirror with Homelink, cruise, tilt/slide sunroof plus fixed alpine roof.
AUDIO	Harman/Kardon 240 watts, 9 speakers, aux input, CD, wheel-mounted controls, glass-mounted multi-antenna.
BASE PRICE	\$ 59,645
Black lacquer finish trim	350
PREMIUM LOGIC7® AUDIO PACKAGE	480 watts, speakers, digital satellite radio
LUXURY INTERIOR PACKAGE	Premium seats, heated front and rear; heated windshield/washers and steering wheel; 20-inch alloy wheels; cooler box, contrast stitch, adjustable driver's seat side bolsters
Destination charge	850
TOTAL	\$ 67,195

KEEP RIGHT >>

Logbook (cont'd) >>



BRAND POSITIONING AND LOGBOOK NOTES (CONT'D)

than the full-size Range Rover. In linear dollars, it's a savings of almost \$20k against the big Range Rover, but an add-on of less than \$12k against the LR4. If your basis of lust is the big Range Rover, the clever positioning of the Range Rover Sport will grab the shopper with a budget. If this is the style and feature set you're after, you know you'll find a way to pay the difference.

SEE, TOUCH AND FEEL

We are not always big fans of a lot of mixed surfaces, and piano black surfaces don't always tickle our keyboard, but this interior is gorgeous, with rich brick-brown leather, soft-touch black surfaces, sizable speaker grilles with complementary patterns and shades, then polished aluminum on the door grabs, along with leather and more piano black. It's rich and very well coordinated. Stylewise, the interior gets a strong A; functionwise maybe a B.

The touchscreen panel, with a tidy set of fairly minimal dials and buttons below, is very effective, though polarized sunglasses interfere. The upgraded LOGIC7 audio system is good: the louder the better, and it's good quiet, too, which of course is the true test. Satellite radio tuning was painfully slow, with a significant wait between each station. It wouldn't hurt to have a little illumination on the engine stop button at night. Keyless start does require staying on the button a bit, as with the LR4.

The large greenhouse gives great visibility in all directions, and the backup camera has considerably better than average image quality. Side mirrors are good, and they are big—big enough in fact to add a bubble to both of them, if it were ours. The large interior volume is surely one reason,

though, that it seems to take awhile to cool off on a 110-degree day.

TIGHT, FIRM, PLEASANT

The Range Rover Sport is extremely maneuverable, not top-heavy, and it turns on a dime, with a turning circle of 37.8 feet—a few inches tighter than a MINI Countryman.

We gave it a brief dirt-road session—sandy, with dips and curves and good braking challenges. It handled and cornered well, even with short wheelbase and tall height. The ride was pleasingly firm on bumps, with a solid stance and good grip. It will do well in a more challenging situation.

DECISIONS, DECISIONS

A slight slope to the Range Rover Sport's roof and rise in its beltline hint at the style direction of the new Range Rover Evoque (see box). This is expected to be a major game-changer for Land Rover, bringing the share of V8 purchases from 97 percent (three percent are the six-cylinder LR2) down to 50 percent, quite quickly. For all the reasons the Sport can pull your attention away from the big Range Rover, the Evoque may be able to do it moreso.

The LR4, the upcoming Evoque, and both Range Rovers comprise a well-thought-out lineup. The Range Rover Sport delivers the best from the highest and medium-low points on the spectrum. The brand overall has broadened its appeal and is on track to deliver even more. ■

mph in just 7.2 seconds. It won't win many prizes for fuel economy with an EPA rating of 13 mpg city and 18 mpg highway, but we actually averaged 16.9 mpg despite some foot-to-the-floor sprints to merge onto freeways. The Supercharged version ups the horsepower to 510 and drops the 0-to-60 time to 5.9 seconds. The supercharger takes just one mpg from city and highway mileage numbers. The HSE models and the Supercharged have electronically limited top speeds of 130 mph and 140 mph, respectively.

THE SPORTING LIFE

The weight, rock-solid body and luxury appointments combined with one of the quietest interiors in any kind of vehicle we have driven, to give the Sport almost a cocoon-like feel. This safe feeling is further enhanced with all the latest safety and security equipment and driver aids—including everything from Active Roll Mitigation, which stabilizes the ride, to automatic xenon headlights that light up the countryside. The other design feature we really appreciate is excellent visibility through the tall windows with small roof pillars. That can be further improved with the new Vision Assist Package (\$1,200) which includes automatic high beam and adaptive HID headlights, plus a clever Surround View Camera that uses four cameras to display a full 360-degree view around the vehicle.

We've always been surprised by the large number of Range Rovers on the streets and highways but have doubted that all those classy owners we see behind the wheel are off-roaders. But we certainly understand the appeal of driving these great SUVs. Range Rovers may be one of the top status symbols, but they are also one of our favorite SUVs to drive, just for the fun of it. Plus who knows when you might want to ford a stream or climb a large boulder. ■

A NEW, THIRD RANGE ROVER OPTION ARRIVES

The Evoque is the smallest, lightest, most fuel-efficient Range Rover ever produced, yet it still carries the brand's rugged DNA. It has front and rear axle clearances of 8.4 inches and 9.5 inches, respectively. Front and rear overhangs are minimal, providing an approach angle of 25°, ramp angle of 22° and departure angle of 33° (19, 22 and 30° in the Dynamic version), and it can still ford a challenging stream, with a wading depth of 19.7 inches. Yet, it will surely see around-town duty, in a five-door Evoque with a base price of \$43,145 or a three-door Evoque Coupe starting at \$44,145 (plus \$850 destination charge). The EPA estimates fuel economy at 19 mpg city and 28 mpg highway from an all-aluminum four-cylinder 240-hp direct-injection engine—a Range Rover first. The compact SUV is offered with a lavishly appointed cabin in three design themes: the cool and contemporary Pure, the luxurious Prestige and the bold and sporting Dynamic. Family users will find the flexibility and luggage space of a compact station wagon. Evoque will be sold in 160 countries worldwide, with North American deliveries beginning in October 2011. ■

