Armchair luxury

'... quality is ingrained, not superficial.'

ROVERS have been described as among the seven best-made cars in the World. We won't start an argument here about which are the other six qualifiers or exactly what position the Rover holds. Who is to judge such a nebulous concept? But it is certainly true that Rover build cars with a thoroughness and philosophy matched by few other manufacturers. Quality is ingrained, not superficial. Rovers are made to last. We cannot verify this objectively in a 1,500-mile road test but you can look elsewhere for confirmation. Try spotting an early 3-litre from its condition: generally you cannot because most of the Mk. I cars (identified by the anti-draught glass strip above the side windows) look and sound just as healthy as the models now leaving Solihull.

Although the 3-litre is now eight years old, it is still one of the most refined saloons in the world for comfort and quietness; few cars provide better insulation from the traffic commotion outside. Four contoured armchair seats (adapted from the successful Rover 2000 formula) and a separate heating system at the back have raised the standard of comfort on the Mk. III to such a high level that you can forgive the slightly turbulent ride on bad roads—one of the few things that betray the design’s age.

The 2000 conquered the traditional Rover image of a car for elderly gentlemen but you could hardly describe the 3-litre, with a price of £2,000, as a young man’s car; young tycoons would probably prefer something more lively and responsive, even though the 3-litre will top 100 m.p.h. and handles a lot better than might be expected for such a stately carriage. It is a car for relaxation, not exhilaration. Hence the optional automatic transmission, perhaps the smoothest Borg Warner 35 installation we have yet tried, and power steering that did not get such unanimous praise although it makes the car very easy and light to drive.

Performance and economy

Most people who drove our test car said that it felt sluggish. For half the price you can certainly buy other saloons with more performance but we suspect that 3-litre owners will be satisfied with what they have. Moreover, the stop-watch shows the acceleration to be better than it feels—the smooth serenity of it all is deceptive. Over-riding automatic drive manually, the acceleration to 50 m.p.h. is equal to that of a Triumph Spitfire, Citroen ID19 or Simca 1500 Estate though it is generally inferior to competitive automatics shown in the comparison charts. The Rover is at its best when cruising quietly and effortlessly at up to 90 m.p.h. on fast main roads or motorways.

After pulling a T-handle choke control under the dashboard, the engine starts instantly from cold: the choke can then be set to give a fast idle until a thermostatically controlled yellow light shines from the facia indicating that normal running temperature has been reached and that the choke should be in. During the warming up period, the engine pulls smoothly from low revs but on full throttle will occasionally miss a beat with a muffled cough.

By Motor’s standards, the overall petrol consumption of 17.4 m.p.g. is not too bad for such a heavy car; it is 2 m.p.g. better than that of the 3-litre automatic coupé we tested in 1963, though the

PRICE £1,571 10s. plus £328 19s. 2d. purchase tax equals £1,900 9s. 2d. (including automatic transmission).
Clubland: deep, contoured armchairs (adjustable for reach, height and rake at the front) provide sumptuous comfort for four people. The central arm-rest at the back—which conceals a trunk box—can be folded away to make room for a fifth person. The passenger's headrest shown here is an extra.

The grille badge is now like the Rover 2000's and the side strip is new. Rare novelty: you can start the 3-litre with a handle.

Pulling up on the lever releases the friction lock that holds the squab angle. Very fine adjustment is possible. The panel behind—operated by either front- or back-seat passengers—houses a two-speed rear heater and a radio control.

Parcel accommodation is good but the facia and its controls—even those on the instruments nascelles—are rather distant. Uninterrupted crash padding extends along the top and bottom of the facia.

Automatics—how they run

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Car</th>
<th>Maximum Speed (m.p.h.)</th>
<th>Acceleration (100-130)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rover 3-litre Mk. III</td>
<td>70-75-80-85-90-100-105</td>
<td>12-13-14-15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daimler 2½-litre</td>
<td>70-75-80-85-90-100-105</td>
<td>12-13-14-15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humber Imperial</td>
<td>70-75-80-85-90-100-105</td>
<td>12-13-14-15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vanden Plas 4-litre R</td>
<td>70-75-80-85-90-100-105</td>
<td>12-13-14-15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pontiac Parisienne</td>
<td>70-75-80-85-90-100-105</td>
<td>12-13-14-15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Triumph 2000</td>
<td>70-75-80-85-90-100-105</td>
<td>12-13-14-15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Performance figures of 127 cars tested by Motor in the past two years appear on page 120.
Rover 3-litre automatic

Continued

figures are not strictly comparable. The saloon’s consumption has also benefited from the 70 m.p.h. speed limit; normally, we would have cruised at 90 m.p.h. when the consumption falls to less than 16 m.p.g. compared with 21-1 m.p.g. at 70 m.p.h. There is no pinking on 98 octane Premium petrol.

Transmission

On Mk. III automatics, a Borg Warner 35 gearbox replaces the older DG model. Gearbox ratios are slightly lower than before but the 3.54:1 final drive raises the overall gearing so that top gear now gives 22.4 m.p.h. per 1,000 engine r.p.m. compared with the 20.6 m.p.h. of the earlier 119 b.h.p. car. The effect on performance is negligible but there are gains in quietness and economy at high speeds.

Undoubtedly the cushioning effect of a heavy car has helped to smooth the gear changes but the transmission has also been carefully matched to the engine, even to the extent of having a special torque converter. There is a slight but definite judder when accelerating hard in first and we would prefer a more progressive throttle linkage to give finer starting and manoeuvring control; otherwise, the transmission is free from jerks and surging and even the kick-down operates smoothly. Apart from a curious hissing noise when moving off, it is also very quiet.

The short steering column selector is easy to use for downward lever movements, a little less so for moving up and it is sometimes hard to see the indicator if a steering wheel spoke is in the way. Automatic drive gives full-throttle maximum speeds in the two lower gears of 38 and 69 m.p.h.; by using the selector, these can be raised to 45 and 75 m.p.h. respectively—both of them clearly marked on the speedometer. Far more important than these academic facts is the transmission, apart from being very

Continued on the next page
smooth, is apparently foolproof: it is not confused by sudden open/shut throttle movements and never leaps uncertainly from one gear to another. Apart from the occasional use of intermediate hold for hill-climbing or slow, twisty roads, you tend to retain the lever at the fully automatic setting and leave the rest to science.

**Handling and brakes**

This big, unsporting car can be hurled through corners with great whooshing noises coming from the tyres but little fear of unstickung them unless you try a great deal harder than was ever intended. On wet or dry roads, consistent understeer dictates big, indecile steering wheel movements for fast cornering and, predictably, it is the front wheels that will ultimately break away first. At this improbable stage, tyre scrub is so acute that the car slows down quickly when you lift off and adhesion is restored. We did not have a chance to drive on snow or ice but on a particularly greasy country road—splattered with mud from a tractor convoy—the Rover changed its character and slid the tail first with little provocation from the throttle. Again, a minor slide is virtually self-correcting when you lift off.

The Hydrosteer power assistance fitted as standard to all 3-litre Rovers takes most of the effort out of steering without displaying that featherweight, disconnected feel so typical of most American cars. To reduce rapid wheel turning on sharp, slow corners the variable ratio linkage gets progressively quicker as you wind on lock: relatively large movements are needed for gentle bends, which gives the impression of little or no road feel around the straight-ahead position. Probably because of this, some of our drivers did not like the steering very much until they had done a considerable mileage.

As the figures show, the servo-assisted disc/drum brakes worked impressively well at only moderate pedal pressures, though the brake pedal on our test car had a rather long, spongy travel and did not feel very reassuring at first. The handbrake provides quite a good emergency stop but needed a pull beyond the strength of most women to hold the car on a 1 in 3 hill.

**Comfort and controls**

Comfort depends on a great many things—ride, seats, quietness, ventilation, heating, fittings... In all these respects except the ride, the 3-litre sets very high standards. Both front and back seats are very deep, fairly firm and expertly contoured to support the thighs, spine and shoulders in the right places. You would not fit these big, heavy seats in a competition car—side support is not that good—but they would make splendid armchairs in anyone's living room.

Other manufacturers must soon copy Rover's lead of providing infinitely fine squad movements with a friction lock operated simply by releasing a handy lever; the usual notchted adjustments seldom provide exactly the right angle. You can raise yourself above other motorists by winding on a handle at the front of the seat and there is the usual wide adjustment for reach so the 3-litre caters for people of all shapes and sizes. Even the arm rests can be adjusted. Although the back seat has been contoured for only two people, a third can sit less comfortably in the centre between them; because he sits further forward, there is no battle for shoulder space. Rear-seat legroom has been increased by a useful 2 1/2 inches and is now sufficient to be able to stretch and relax in great comfort. The suspension is harder than currently fashionable for a luxury saloon and on bad roads it can be heard and felt beating a relatively smooth passage for the heavy body. The 2000 does the job very much better and gives an insight of what to expect from the next generation of big Rovers.

The 3-litre makes very little noise. Only when accelerating hard in the lower gears are you really conscious of the muffled hum from the engine: at 70 m.p.h. it is scarcely audible and wind and tyre roar have also been well isolated. Two distant heater controls working vertically in the centre of the facia regulate the temperature and distribution of incoming air which seems to seep through the car—taking some time to do it after a cold start—without causing any uncomfortable blasts or hot spots. There is a completely separate recirculatory heater at the back with a two-speed fan control between the front seats on the transmission tunnel. Outlets beneath the back seat keep your feet comfortably warm without making the air at head height too stuffy. In addition to the front...
Engine

- Cylinders: 6
- Bore and stroke: 78.8 mm x 105 mm
- Cubic capacity: 2995 cc
- Valves: overhead inlet, side exhaust
- Compression ratio: 8.75:1
- Carburetor: S.U. HD6 2 in.
- Fuel pump: Horizontal S.U. electric
- Oil filter: N/A
- Max power (net): 121 b.h.p. at 4600 r.p.m.
- Max torque (net): 160 ft. at 2600 r.p.m.

Transmission

- Gearbox: Borg Warner 35 automatic with fluid torque converter driving a 3-speed planetary gear train
- Top gear: 1:00:1
- 1st gear: 1:45:1
- 2nd gear: 2:39:1
- Reverse: 2:09:1
- Final drive: Spiral bevel 3:51:1
- 5th gear at 1,000 r.p.m.: 22.4
- 4th gear: 15.2
- 3rd gear: 9.4

Chassis

- Construction: Unitary steel body attached to a welded steel chassis unit at the front

Brakes

- Type: Girling vacuum servo assisted
- Dimensions: 10.75 in. front discs, 11 in. rear drums.
- Front: 2.25 in. wide
- Location areas: Front: 20.35 sq. in. of lining

Suspension and steering

- Front: Independent by wishbones and laminated torsion bars; telescopic dampers and an anti-roll bar
- Rear: Live rear axle with semi-elliptic leaf springs and telescopic dampers

Shock absorbers

- Front and rear: Hydrotower power-assisted worm and peg

Tyres

- Tyres: 6.70 x 15 (Dunlop Roadspeed tubeless or Avon Turanspeed M. IV tubeless)

Rims

- 5.5 x 15 in.

Coachwork and equipment

- Starting handle
- Jack:
- Jacking points: 2 each side under body sills
- Battery:
- Voltage: 12 volt 57 amp hrs capacity

Number of electrical fuses

- 11 fuses

Indicators

- Self cancelling flashers
- Variable speed self-parking electric
- Press button electric

Screen wipers

- Sun visors
- Locks:
- With ignition key:
- Front doors and petrol filler cap
- With other keys:
- Boot and facia glove box

Interior heater

- Fresh air heater/demister in front, separate recirculating heater in rear compartment

Automatic transmission:
- Heated back window, laminated windscreen, passenger headrest

Leather:
- Carpet with felt underlay

Coupé:

Maintenance

- Sump: 10 pints S.A.E. 20
- Gearbox: 15 pints ATF
- Rear axle: 3 pints 90 EP
- Steering gear: 26 pints (drain taps 2)
- Cooling system: Every 6,000 miles to 1 point
- Minimum service interval:
- Ignition timing:
- Contact breaker gap:
- Sparking plug gap:
- Sparking plug type:
- Tappet clearances (hot):
- Valve timing:
- Inlet opens:
- Exhaust opens:
- Water temperature:
- Petrol reserve:
- Ignition light:
- Heater fan speed:
- Ignition/spark:
- Air vent:
- Horsepower:
- Cooling:
- Oil pressure:
- Cold start test:
- Rear screen demister:
- Headlights:
- Direction indicator:
- Headlight flasher:
- Bonnet release:
- Handbrake:
- Cold air vent:
- Handbrake warning light:

Fittings and furniture

- Time alone will measure the quality and workmanship behind the 3-litre's engineering: it takes only a few minutes to see and assess the quality of the fittings and furniture inside. The decor is traditional British, which is traditional Rover: leather upholstery, African Cherry wood cappings (a nice change from walnut), thick carpets, and black fittings and controls. It is all very tasteful, unembellished and expensive. We have never particularly liked the 3-litre's instruments nacelle. The clear, round, white-on-black instruments are easy to see and read. But the minor toggle switches, all working in a horizontal plane, cannot be operated without taking a hand off the wheel and although the positions are logical it takes some time to memorize them all. The windscreen washer, tucked away on the side of the nacelle, the two heater controls in the centre and several...
under-scuttle knobs are all particularly awkward to reach if you are strapped in.

There are a number of unusual luxury fittings. The electric clock, which used to be in the centre of the facia where parallax made it difficult to read, has been moved to the passenger’s end of the curved wrap-round facia. This leaves a safer unobstructed padded roll right round the top of the scuttle. Apart from individual reading lights for each passenger, there is a light in the front passenger’s headrest (an option) which can be adjusted to a position just above your lap in the back seat. There are stow-away central picnic trays - the back one with cut-outs to hold glasses, the front one concealing a splendid tool-set embedded in a foam rubber cradle. Little touches like this will delight the connoisseur. The deep full-width parcel shelf in front will swallow more oddments than that of most cars but it is well forward of the seats and not within easy reach. However, it does emphasize the spacious feeling inside the car. There is also a lockable facia glove box and the back seat arm-rest conceals a “trinket” compartment. The battery steals a useful corner in the boot, but not the spare wheel which has its own cradle underneath, leaving room for plenty of luggage.

Full-width padding on the top and bottom of the facia provides a soft landing for passengers thrown forward in a crash or sudden braking but there are a few hard projections in between. Our test cars had lap-and-diagonal seat belts which were easy to clip together and tension but, as so often happens, they tended to get trapped beneath the front seats; with a distant facia and controls, inertia lock safety belts which provide freedom of movement would be better.

### Servicing and accessibility

Very few new-car owners are going to maintain a 3-litre Rover themselves; for those who do, the servicing schedule is summarized below. Service intervals have been extended to once every 5,000 miles so most people will only lose their car to the garage two or three times a year. There is no fixed price for each service and the handbook says “where a high standard of work is looked for the higher price of labour charges is inevitable”. So competent servicing is not likely to be cheap.

Although the bonnet is pretty well filled with machinery, those ancillaries that are likely to involve the owner are mostly accessible — the coil, windscreen washer bottle, filler caps for the radiator, oil, power steering and hydraulic reservoir, two dipsticks, distributor and starter solenoid.

### Maintenance summary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A</th>
<th>Engine. Every 5,000 miles: change oil; renew external filter, check slow running, clean spark plugs, check distributor points. Water level: Every 10,000 miles: clean and re-oil engine breather filter, check oil in carb, damper.</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>Gearbox. Every 5,000 miles: check fluid level. Every 10,000 miles: drain and re-fill.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Back axle and prop shaft. Every 5,000 miles: check oil level; lubricate prop shaft sliding joint. Every 10,000 miles: drain and re-fill back axle.</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>Power steering. Every 5,000 miles: check fluid level. Every 10,000 miles: check rubber boots on steering joints.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>Brakes and wheels. Every 5,000 miles: check brake reservoir level. Level safety switch: thickness of front pads (min. 3 mm); adjust rear wheel brakes: change and wash road wheels. Check brake fluid reservoirs. Every 10,000 miles: check front hubs for leaks. Every 20,000 miles: check front wheel alignment; renew all filter elements on servo. Every 40,000 miles: renew all rubber seals in brake system.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Electrical. Every 5,000 miles: check battery acid level. Every 10,000 miles: clean, grease and tighten terminals; check headlamps setting.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Miscellaneous: check water level in screen washer; periodically oil linkages; doors; etc. Every 10,000 miles.