

4x4 OF THE YEAR

2004 • FULL-SIZE GROUP •

1st

RANGE ROVER TD6 VOGUE



There's still nothing to touch the Range Rover for sheer classy competence; few get anywhere near projecting the same level of image and presence on and off the road. Most modern challengers have given up all pretence of true off-road ability, which in spite of its imposing looks and superbly-trimmed luxurious interior the Range Rover still has in spades, and remains one of the strongest reasons for picking it as a winner since its road behaviour is well up to the standard of anything offered by any of its rivals. Certainly the Range Rover is expensive, but it deserves to be, not only because of the air of expert craftsmanship exuded by the stitched leather clothing the executive-style cabin, and the comprehensive equipment specification including true concert-quality stereo, but because of the strong heritage, that dates back over three decades, which has always marked it as Britain's, and the world's, premier off-roader.

CLASS ACT

If this version has a failing it's in the mild power output of the Td6 engine. In terms of refinement and power delivery it's a brilliant piece of engineering, but this really is a car that deserves well over 200 horsepower. Excellent sound deadening means the engine is not intrusive in leisurely driving, but when you're in a hurry there's no hiding the fact that the engine is working hard to shift the bulk of this imposing off-road limousine. From a standing start there's just a little too much delay as the transmission waits for the engine to spin up into its power band before

clutching in the drive, and though the engine never sounds harsh at can be heard straining at high revs in its effort to pull the Range Rover up to speed. The V8 petrol version is without question the version to own, but for the simple fact that the Td6 promises 25mpg economy. But in every other respect the Range Rover is a clear winner. On the road it's a fast and refined long distance cruiser, effortless once up to speed, while on winding country highways its roadholding has to be experienced to be believed. The air suspension – a technology since adopted by several rivals – gives a magic carpet quality of ride while keeping the big car stable at all times, while a clever valving arrangement softens the suspension for off-road conditions, allowing an almost unbelievable amount of wheel articulation considering the all-independent suspension set-up.

4WD is permanent with an auto-engaging centre differential lock, and although there are no axle differential locks the Range Rover has an impressively effective electronic traction control system that with the rumbling torque of the big V8 gives it pretty much go-anywhere ability; the less beefy Td6 doesn't cope quite as well with extreme-situation steep slippery climbs, but the traction aids are well up to seeing it through the mud, slush and rutted trails of more normal off-road usage. Another key to the Range Rover's success is the simplicity of operation. Flick the little toggle switch on the central console in the direction of the mountain symbol and you're in low range off-roading mode, tap the rocker switch on the dash to increase the ground clearance. Then point the car where you want to go and drive.

SPECIFICATIONS

Price:	£51,995
Engine cc/bhp:	2926/174
Transmission:	Five-speed automatic, dual range, permanent 4WD

RATINGS (0-10)

Comfort:	8
Refinement:	8
Off-road:	9
Value:	7
Style:	9
TOTAL:	41

WE LIKED:
Gorgeous interior
WE DISLIKED:
Soft Td6 performance

