



Rover 25

Featuring 1.4i S



WE WERE TESTING ROVER'S SPORTY little hatchback amidst the furore over BMW's abandonment of the marriage. If one steps back and tries to assess the product on its merits, rather than its poor image and dubious future prospects, this 1.4i S version of the revamped 200 proves that it has much to commend it as a warm (if not hot) hatch.

Its 103bhp engine is actually a bit slower and thirstier than before but, helped by taller gearing, it's now a paragon in terms of flexibility and mechanical refinement; it makes all the right noises when stretched through the gears and virtually no noise at all when cruising. The deft gearchange and now-smooth, if still moderately weighty, clutch add to the driver appeal, whilst well-shaped and padded front seats locate and support extremely well, even though there are no adjusters for lumbar support or seat height. The only objections will come from lanky types, who will find their heads brushing the roof (at front and rear) and who will find the accelerator too close for comfort.

This version's image and intentions suit the new stiffer suspension settings admirably, as well. The ride is unyielding over rough surfaces, it's true, but the driver enjoys the tenacious grip on 55-Series rubber, with alert response in the steering department and a marked absence of bump-steer. Nevertheless, we think it was naive to adopt this stiffer set-up on the lower-powered E and L versions, which by their

character are ideally suited to the previous 200's softer settings.

Our tape measure revealed usefully improved back seat stretching space for legs – like the new Skoda Fabia, the 25 is a larger-than-average supermini both outside and inside. The luggage volume with seats occupied is better than most, as well, at 12.2 cu ft behind the seat. The backrest is split but it only flops on to the fixed cushion, so front occupants are less secure, in heavy braking for example. In compensation, you can carry a plank or a roll of carpet on the nearside, up to 2¼m long, if pressed.

Luggage security is also a mixed blessing – you can double-lock the tailgate against the central locking and secure boot contents from the interior (the seat releases are in the boot); but if you lock up with the remote handset, then open the tailgate (or driver's door) by key, the alarm goes off.

VERDICT

Since its inception as a 214, this small Rover has become much better equipped, significantly cheaper and noticeably more refined in the way it sounds and goes. Sadly, it's been adversely affected by a largely unjustified, tarnished image.

However, unless you want a soft ride and class-leading fuel economy (neither of which is a strong point in its favour), the 25 has little mud sticking to it, so far as we're concerned.

PERFORMANCE

Acceleration time in seconds

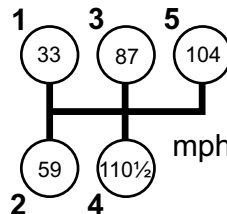
mph	30	40	50	60	70
THROUGH THE GEARS		2.3	4.6	7.3	11.4
IN 5TH GEAR		7.1	14.9	22.8	32.5
IN 4TH GEAR		5.1	10.1	15.6	22.0

20 mph	30	40	50	60	70
5TH/4TH SPEED RANGES	14.3/10.4		15.7/10.5		
		14.9/10.1		17.6/11.9	

Maximum speeds

REVS PER MINUTE	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th
		6500*		6550	5000

* for best acceleration



FUEL CONSUMPTION

Type of use - with air conditioning off*	mpg
Urban (17mph average/heavy traffic)	27½
Suburban (27mph average/6.4 miles from cold start)	33½
Motorway (70mph cruising)	35
Cross-country (brisk driving/20 miles from cold start)	40
Rural (gentle driving/20 miles from cold start)	45½
Typical mpg overall	38
Realistic tank range (not nominal tank capacity)	42 litres/350 miles

*with air conditioning switched on, consumption will increase by 2–4% in winter and 4–8% in summer

FOR THE TECHNICAL

ENGINE

Type transverse four cylinders in line with all-alloy block and head; five main bearings

Size 75 x 79mm = 1396cc

Power 103 bhp at 6000rpm

Torque 91 lb ft at 4500 rpm

Valves belt-driven twin overhead camshafts actuating four valves per cylinder via hydraulic tappets

Fuel/ignition electronic multi-point petrol injection integrated with spark timing and direct ignition (no HT leads) three-way exhaust catalyser and 50-litre fuel tank, with low-level warning lamp

TRANSMISSION

Type five-speed manual, front wheel drive (no automatic option)

Mph per 1000rpm 20.9 in 5th; 16.9 in 4th

CHASSIS

Suspension front: independent damper/struts with integral coil springs. Rear: torsion beam (dead) axle with coil springs. Front anti-roll bar and telescopic dampers all round

Steering rack and pinion with hydraulic power assistance; 3.0 turns between full locks. Turning circle diameter averages 10.3m between kerbs, with 15.15m circle for one turn of the wheel

Wheels 5½J alloy with 185/55 R15V tyres (Pirelli P6000 on test car). Space-saver temporary spare (full-size wheel/tyre optional extra)

Brakes solid discs front, drums rear with vacuum servo as standard. (electronic ABS optional extra)

SAFETY AND SECURITY FEATURES

Seatbelts

front height-adjustable
pre-tensioning with load-limiter when airbag fitted
rear 3 inertia-reel belts

Airbags

driver 45 litre
passenger optional
others no sidebags

Head restraints

front two front-vertically removable and adjustable
rear optional

Other features

volume sensor for alarm optional; electronic-triggering for airbags and belt-tensioners at front

Euro NCAP crash test results

No data available

Door locking

central locking? ☒
remote control? ☒
auto window closure? ☒
deadlocks? ☒

Luggage

secure from interior/hidden from view ●●●●○

Alarm

●●●●○

Ignition switch/immobiliser

●●●●○

○○○○○ assessment of effectiveness and convenience - the more blobs the better

☐ factory fitted optional extra

☒ standard on this model

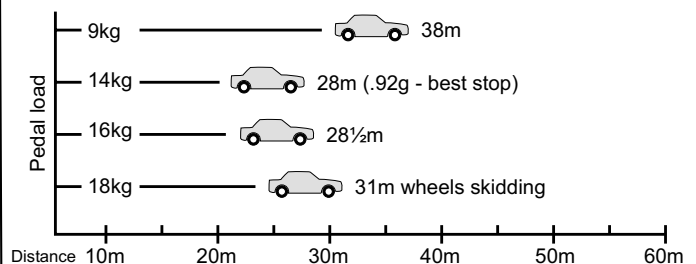
☒ not available on this model

BRAKES

Pedal feel ●●●●○ Behaviour in an emergency ●●○○○ Handbrake ●●●●○

Dry road stopping distance from 50mph (optional ABS not fitted)

A good-to-average best stop is about 28m at 20-30kg pedal load

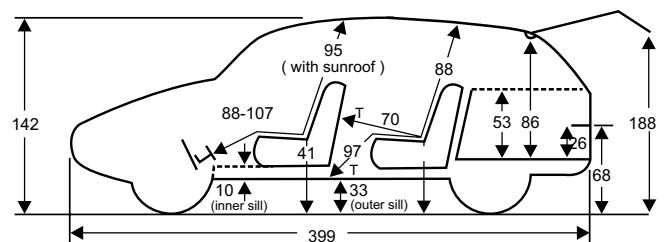


Fade test: pedal load required for a moderate (34m/.75g) stop: 10kg at start of test, 15kg at end of test (ideal brakes show no change)

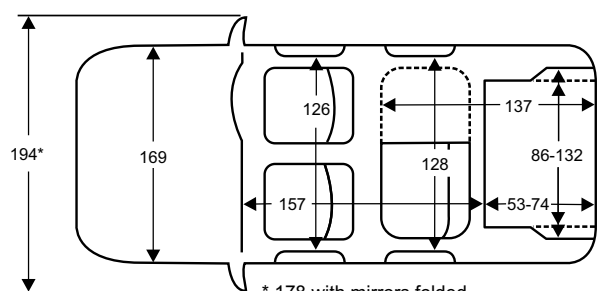
MEASUREMENTS

Centimetres

Three-door hatchback



T: typical back seat space behind medium-sized front occupants



* 178 with mirrors folded

kerb weight : 1040kg (maker's figure)

LIKES AND GRIPES

Ideal rear wash and (intermittent) wipe arrangement	...	but no variable intermittent sweep up front
Door mirrors give a bigger view	...	but are still tetchy to adjust and make the car wider than catalogue says (see our table)
Melodic twin windtone horns (very English)	...	but operating buttons miniscule
Rear footwell heater outlets	...	but easily blocked by carpet (ours was)
Cold face-level vent delivery with heater on	...	but the centre vents aim is still awry



HOW THE 25 COMPARES	Engine (cyl/cap/power (no/cc/bhp))	Revs at 70mph (rpm)	30-70mph through gears (sec)	30-70mph in 5th/4th gears (sec)	Fuel economy (mpg)	Brakes best stop (m/kg)	Maximum legroom - front (cm)	Typical leg/kneeroom - rear (cm)	Steering turns/ (p) circle (m)	Overall length (cm)
ROVER 25i S	4/1396/103	3360	11.4	32.5/22.0	38	28/14	107	97/70	3.0/10.3	399
Ford Fiesta 1.4	4/1388/90	3520	11.1	28.6/18.7	41	28/16	108	92/67	2.9/10.1	383
Citroën Saxo 1.4	4/1360/75	3180	11.5	27.0/118.6	46½	29/27	105	91/66	3.7/10.7(m)	372
Fiat Punto 1.2 16v*	4/1242/80	3210	11.7	29.7/20.2	41	27/12	108	96/67	2.8/10.85	380/4†
Vauxhall Corsa 1.4 16v	4/1389/90	3620	10.0	23.8/16.1	42	28½/16	104	99/67	2.8/10.4	373
Rover 214 Si (1996 version)	4/1396/103	3530	10.5	26.0/18.4	39½	28/16	107	94/65	3.4/10.4	397
* performance and economy figures for 1997/99 version									(m) manual steering †3/5 door	