



Rover 75



THE 75 IS THE FIRST OF A NEW GENERATION of Rovers resulting from BMW's ownership of the company, yet it's been designed solely in-house. Indeed, it's the first Rover to be so produced in over 20 years – with just a little help from the Germans. Oh yes, and a massive injection of their cash.

It's a (fairly) compact executive that replaces both the outgoing 600 and 800 models, and sits midway between them in size, with a traditionally styled, chrome-bedecked body that's claimed to be two-and-a-half times stiffer than the 600's. Right from the start there's a trio of trim levels and a quartet of engines.

The smallest of the power units is a new 1.8-litre variant of the already well-proven K-Series. In fact, it feels just a little overwhelmed in the new car – not that 0-60mph in a claimed 10.9sec is to be sneered at. It's a bit growly at times and noticeably boomy at around 3500rpm. You also have to work harder on the excellent gearchange on gradients than you do with the more powerful models. It's also quite low geared in top. What we really dislike, though, is the way that the revs hang up

after you lift off the accelerator – it's an emissions thing, but it needs sorting in more subtle fashion.

The bigger engines are a real treat, and much more in keeping with the 75's aspirations. The high-performing, refined 2.5 V6 is matched for smoothness by the shorter-stroke two-litre version which, although it may be a little slower, still gives vigorous performance with a purposeful hum. Both display splendid "fifth and forget" low-speed affability.

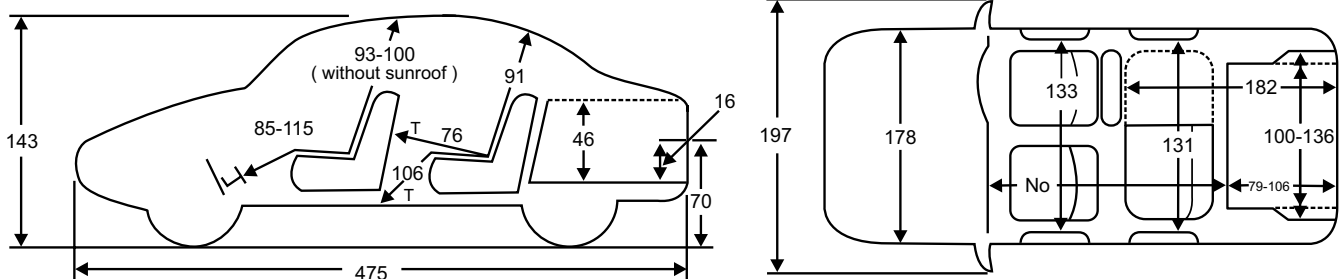
Perhaps the biggest surprise is how well the BMW-sourced two-litre diesel behaves. It might seem an incongruous motor, given the 75's opulence, but perhaps not so surprising when you consider how well basically the same engine performs in the BMW 3-Series. Some people will consider it the pick of the bunch for its "common rail" quietness, eager performance and the promise of mid-forties mpg.

All four engines are available with an ultra-compact five-speed automatic transmission that provides superbly smooth shifts, with a choice of normal, sport or economy modes. If anything, though, it can be

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FACTS AND FIGURES

	1.8	2.5 V6	2.0 Turbo-diesel
ENGINE			
Type	transverse in-line four cylinder	transverse 90° V6	transverse in-line four cylinder
Capacity	1796cc	2497cc	1950cc
Valves	belt-driven double OHC, four valves per cylinder	belt-driven OHC per bank, four valves per cylinder	chain-driven double OHC, four valves per cylinder
Fuel/ignition	multi-point petrol injection and direct injection with plug-top coils		common rail, direct injection; compression ignition
Power	120bhp at 5500rpm	177bhp at 6500rpm	116bhp at 4000rpm
Torque	118 lb ft at 4000rpm	177 lb ft at 4000rpm	192 lb ft at 2000rpm
TRANSMISSION			
Type	five-speed manual (five-speed automatic optional); front-wheel drive. Electronic traction control optional - except on 1.8		
Mph per 1000rpm in 5th (on 195/65R15 tyres)	manual 20.3 automatic 25.4	manual 22.6 automatic 27.1	manual 28.2 automatic 30.6
CHASSIS			
Suspension	front: MacPherson coil spring/damper struts with rear-facing L-shaped lower arms mounted on peripheral sub-frame; anti-roll bar. Rear: Z-axle with coil springs and dampers; integrated trailing arms, plus upper and lower transverse arms; anti-roll bar		
Steering	rack and pinion with hydraulic power assistance		
Wheels	6J x 15in steel with 195/65R15 tyres (6½J x 15in alloy with 205/65R15V tyres optional) Full size spare		
Brakes	servo-assisted ventilated discs front, solid discs rear with four-channel ABS and electronic brake force distribution		



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

over-eager to give a double downshift when you simply want one ratio lower for relaxed overtaking. However, it will adapt to different driving conditions and has full torque converter lock-up on the top three ratios.

Front suspension is of the familiar MacPherson strut-type, but at the rear the 75 employs a re-engineered version of BMW's Z-axle. It's a winning combination. From a standing start the newcomer goes to high on the leader board for ride comfort. Only rarely is its composure caught out, such as on patchy B-roads taken at speed, because for the most part its pliant suppleness gives unruffled progress and it's serene on a motorway, thanks also to low tyre and wind noise. This is impressive enough, but the way that it soaks up pot-holed roads and cobbled streets is exceptional.

The car handles competently, too, but enthusiast drivers seeking sporting handling should look elsewhere, because the 75 is more about relaxed progress and refinement. Its steering, for example, though smooth and positive, doesn't talk to the driver the way that, say, the Alfa 156's does. The 75 can also feel rather ungainly on twisting roads taken at speed, when roll begins to assert itself, although to be fair, with less spirited driving, sideways g is more apparent than body lean.

The tastefully trimmed interior is the epitome of Britishness, with the fascia consisting entirely of high-gloss burr walnut which, like the retro-styled, parchment-coloured dials, you'll either love or hate. And you had better like oval shapes, they're everywhere – ovoid overload, you might say.

Tailoring the driving position to suit most tastes is easy, because there are numerous seating adjustments (including height and lumbar support), steering reach and rake settings and well-placed pedals. Headroom is good, but the outlook is restricted by the small (yes, oval) mirrors, three rear head restraints and a not over-generous amount of window space. Vision was noticeably better in the old 600. We like the stubby column stalks, the stereo and cruise control buttons (when fitted) on the steering wheel, but aren't so keen on the way that the lid of the cassette/CD storage box catches your elbow when you change gear.

The amount of equipment is dependent on model, of course, but even the entry level Classic is well specified and, like the other two models in the range, can be further

topped up with SE goodies. Sorry, no space to go into details here, but you name it and the Connoisseur's got it. There's also a comprehensive accessories list.

Although the back seat can't boast the greatest legroom and kneeroom in this class, there's more space than in the 600 and it's a more comfortable place to be, as well, because the backrest is well angled and shaped and at last there's reasonable thigh support. Try to avoid sitting in the centre, though; it's hard and there's not much headroom. You do get a proper three-point seatbelt, though. The excellent heater and air conditioning (fully automatic on Club models upwards) provide a pleasant atmosphere throughout the cabin, thanks to rear floor outlets and individual fresh air vents between the front seats.

Boot access is marred by a narrow opening and a pronounced sill, but the well-lined compartment is usefully long and wide and actually has the same capacity as the departing 800. To increase luggage space, a one-piece folding rear squab (with ski-flap) is optional on all models, but it doesn't lie flat and the push-button releases aren't thiefproof.

Safety features include front seatbelt pretensioners, driver and front passenger airbags and side airbags. Additional head protection is provided by high-mounted tubular airbags as an option. Remote control central locking is standard, as are an alarm, an immobiliser and deadlocks.

VERDICT

The 75 is the model that must succeed for Rover, and it's a car that deserves to. It feels carefully crafted and is powered by a set of excellent engines – we're particularly impressed by the two-litre V6 and the turbo-diesel. But don't expect it to handle with the agility and turn-in of a 3-Series or an Alfa 156; it's more of a smooth-riding, main road grand tourer, with Roverness oozing from the wood, leather and chromium plating of its cossetting, if only adequately accommodating, cabin.

It is, perhaps, over-ambitious of Rover to call the 75 the best front-wheel drive car in the world, but it can certainly claim that the new model is, as the company used to say back in the fifties, "one of Britain's fine cars."

LIKES AND GRIPES

Pleasant feel and action to switches	...	but door handles need smoother edges
Synchromesh on reverse gear	...	but unnatural feel to ovoid gear knob (auto OK)
Big, deep glovebox	...	but (optional) 6 CD autochanger fills it
Boot hinges no longer impinge on load space	...	but rear bumper vulnerable to scratches