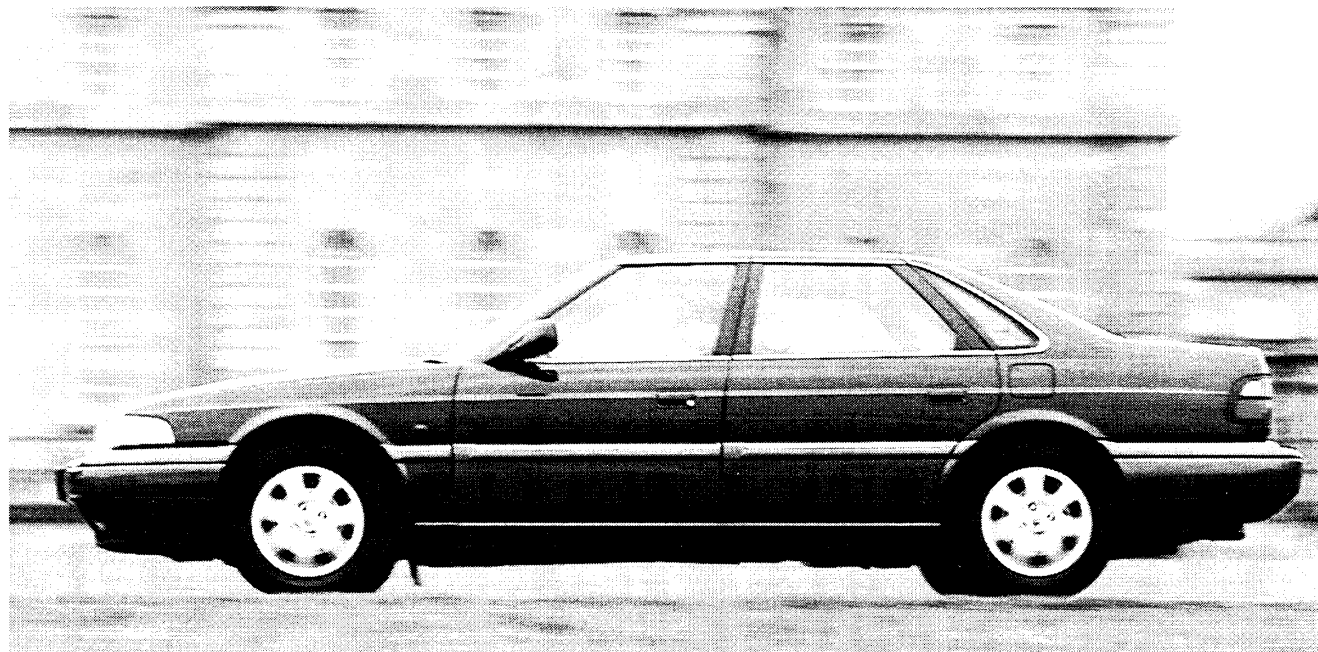


**USED CAR
SURVEY**

Rover 800



If you're thinking of buying a used Rover 800, we can help. We've delved into our breakdown, warranty and vehicle inspection service statistics covering the last few years and have come up with what you need to know if you're planning to become the second owner.

ROVER'S EXECUTIVE-CLASS 800 WAS THE first truly joint product born out of the liaison with Honda. It was first introduced in 1986, powered by a 16-valve two-litre or a high-tech, Honda-sourced 2½-litre V6. Rover's flagship was given a major refit towards the end of 1991, with this second-generation 800 sporting softer, more-rounded styling, a new nose (complete with a smart chrome radiator grille), an upgraded specification and a posse of power unit and running gear revisions.

First-generation 800s will be getting long in the tooth now, so we've focused on the softer-riding post-1991 model for this survey. Like its predecessor, it offers two main body styles – a classic four-door saloon or a more versatile five-door “fastback”. Rover added a rather pretentious two-door Coupé version midway through 1992, but this hasn't sold in huge numbers, so used examples will be comparatively rare.

Under the bonnet, Rover's home-grown 16-valve two-litre and Honda's 2.7-litre, 24-valve V6 have

been the principal power units, although the Italian VM turbo-diesel (installed in the original 800 for its last year or so) was carried over, too. Sporty Vitesse models also get two-litre T-Series power, but with a turbocharger and an intercooler lifting the standard version's respectable 134bhp to an even healthier 178. Like the partnership, the Honda power unit eventually got the elbow, to be replaced by Rover's 2½-litre KV6 early in 1996.

The main points to look for...

Engine and cooling system

Unless you're fanatical about diesels, the 825 derv-burner is probably worth passing up, but, despite the 800's ample proportions, the 134bhp two-litre delivers quite respectable vigour. Notwithstanding improvements over the previous version, however, Rover's four-pot engine still isn't a particularly refined performer. It's not a very dependable one, either. A significant number of the two-litre cars in our survey suffered head gasket troubles, while valves and valve guides give rise to a fair share of repair bills, too. Pick the V6, seems to be the moral: this will reduce the risk of “top-end” troubles, but as Rover's 2.5-litre KV6 version hasn't been around all that long, our data relates mainly to the 2.7-litre Honda unit. Expect a few oil leaks (mainly on the two-litre); the cooling system can be cantankerous, too, with the water pump, thermostat and radiator all prone to snags. Make sure the cam belt has been changed on time on

older or high-mileage cars and, as a complete V6 exhaust system (including catalyser) can set you back almost £1000, make sure none of the pipes looks ripe for renewal. The fuel pump and fuel injection system give trouble occasionally, as well, so ensure that the car starts, runs and idles reliably.

Transmission

A slick five-speed manual gearbox was standard on the two-litre and diesel, but you're more likely to find a four-speed automatic on V6 models, as the self-shifter was usually standard equipment, with a manual 'box available as a no-cost option. Clutches and automatic transmissions have their troubles (again, more likely on the two-litre), but problems are by no means unheard of with the manual gearbox, either. We've come across a number of clutch slave and master cylinders that have needed replacing, and don't forget to check the driveshaft joints for wear and holed gaiters.

Suspension, steering and brakes

Power steering faults are the main snag we've noticed with the 800's running gear, with the rack and pump almost equally likely to give trouble. Check front wheel hub bearings, and the front suspension and anti-roll bar links and bushes, too. Worn or leaking dampers also crop up periodically. The braking system is reasonably well behaved on the whole, but inspect the front brake discs closely as these often need replacing.

Electrics and instruments

The starter motor and alternator head the list of electrical casualties that can be anticipated, but they're by no means the only culprits we've uncovered. Snags seem to strike in almost any area, though the heater motor and instruments, together with the distributor and ignition system suffer more than most. We've noted a few wiper problems, too, but the new-shape 800 isn't anything like as bad as the old one in this respect. The heater matrix sometimes springs a leak, and make sure items like the central locking and electric windows are all behaving themselves; disobedient electric windows are the second most common fault we've come across on the 800.

Bodywork

The new-shape 800 is smoother and more stylish than its predecessor; it's better screwed together, too, although small fittings (minor controls and the like), still lack the robustness of those in an Audi or BMW, for example. Well cared for, the 800's coachwork proves reasonably durable, but you'll doubtless meet examples of hard-used, high-mileage cars that have been less than conscientiously cosseted, evidenced by stone-pecked panelwork, tatty, travel-stained wheels and an assortment of small day-to-day knocks. The

800 was recalled to check front seatbelt security in 1994, so confirm that this has been dealt with.

Costs and servicing

Despite improvements over the old model, the second-generation 800 has failed to shake off its predecessor's reputation for frailty – unwelcome for first owners, perhaps, though better news pricewise if you fancy one secondhand. Rover dealers, though thinner on the ground nowadays, are still reasonably widespread, and parts prices are closer to Ford's than Mercedes'. Insurance starts at group 10 for the two-litre and diesel, is typically 14 for the V6, but understandably, it's a steepish 15 to 17 for performance-oriented Vitesse versions.

So to sum up...

Classy, executive looks and keen secondhand values may be a tempting combination, but patchy build and reliability means that you need to pick carefully to avoid disappointment. V6-powered models are more complex and costlier to buy, run and repair, but Honda heritage is a decisive advantage, as far as the bits under the bonnet go. The diesel is spectacularly unmemorable, while the Coupé promises more than it delivers. Stick with a mainstream model in an attractive colour, with five doors for maximum versatility. A proven reliability record is essential, especially on a two-litre, but even *with* previously good behaviour, Rover 800s don't always stay that way.

We can't tell you which model to choose, but once you've found a car you like, we can provide reassurance by arranging a comprehensive check anywhere in the country by one of our Vehicle Inspection Engineers. Call 0345 500 610 for details of fees or to arrange an inspection. For longer term peace of mind we can also offer mechanical breakdown insurance. For further information, call AA Warranty Services on 0800 269 798.