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1996 Range Rover 4.0 climbs ladder to success

By Anne Fracassa
Avanti NewsFeatures

The 1996 Range Rover 4.0 SE is an expensive piece of automotive equipment.

To be exact: \$55,000.

But it's really, really, really, really nice. And roomy. And comfy.

And it's a lot of fun to drive. Especially if you like off-roading.

This thing could scale Mt. Everest, I'd bet. It might fare as well as the Hummer... who knows?

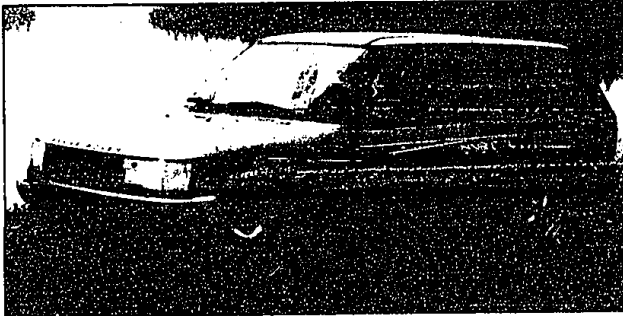
The 4.0 SE could be considered an expensive European sedan on stilts. The comfort level is superb, with plush seating and a suspension you would probably only expect in an expensive BMW or Mercedes-Benz.

Even though it looks like a truck, this high-end sport utility drives like a fine sedan.

The Range Rover folks incorporated an electronic air suspension system with air springs, shock absorbers and height sensors at each wheel. It traverses every surface as if you're driving on a freshly paved roadway.

It's really high off the ground, but that's the nature of this beast.

There aren't any mountains to



Speak of here in southeastern



ROAD TEST
By
Anne Fracassa

Michigan, but colleagues have told me they've made this Range Rover 4.0 climb over the steepest of hills and obstacles without the slightest problem.

That's what was so impressive about this deluxe SUV. No matter that you're high off the ground — a whopping 8.5 inches — the vehicle still absorbs every bump to ensure you get a smooth ride.

When it's time to get out, the height-adjustable suspension system lowers the Range Rover about 3 inches closer to the ground, making it a little easier to get out of.

Introduced in March of last year, the Range Rover 4.0 is all new this year and is the flagship of the Land Rover line of premium 4-wheel-drive vehicles. Land Rover, by the way, is a fully owned subsidiary of BMW. All Land Rovers are manufactured in Solihull, England.

On the outside, the Range Rover 4.0 is a smart mix of aluminum and steel. Styling is distinct. Of course it is — all Land Rovers are.

The first Range Rover was introduced to American roads in 1970, but all of them have a familiar look. It's interesting to note that Land Rover spent more than \$500 million on the redesign of the Range Rover — and changed it for the good.

The 1996 Range Rover 4.0 has permanent 4-wheel-drive. There's also something really different — an "H shift" lever. That means there are two selections on the transmission shifter — low range and high range.

Rather than pushing buttons or shifting a smaller lever, the low and high range are accessed by moving the transmission shift lever across the H gate. It's an interesting concept that works efficiently.

The 4-speed automatic transmis-

sion adapts automatically to how you drive by altering its shift sequences. That provides high rpm upshifts and quicker downshifts in the "Sport" mode. This electronic transmission allows you to choose how you want to drive as well, with normal, sport and manual shift modes. That means in the low range, you can also lock the transmission in a certain gear.

You'd expect a vehicle this high off the ground wouldn't be too stable, but nothing is further from the truth, thanks to a high-quality 31mm sway bar.

What about the wheels? Well, the 16-inch tires have spoked alloy rims. This Range Rover comes with 4-wheel disc brakes and 4-channel all-terrain anti-lock brakes with Land Rover's own electronic traction control.

The heating and cooling controls can be individually adjusted by the driver and passenger, allowing individual needs to be met. Rear seats are a little higher than the driver and passenger front seats, allowing rear passengers a unique view up at the front.

The 4.0-liter sequential multiport

fuel-injected aluminum alloy V-8 engine is rated at 190 horsepower. Mileage is 13 mph in the city, 17 on the highway. Top speed is 118 mph and its towing capacity is 6,500 pounds.

Also available on the Range Rover is a 4.6-liter 225 horsepower V-8 engine that was redesigned to improve gas flow for increased performance.

The 1996 Range Rover 4.0 has all the appointments you'd thirst for in a luxury automobile.

Take a deep breath and try these on for size: Leather seats all around, dual air bags, an adjustable tilt steering wheel, an automatic dimming rearview mirror, air conditioning, child locks on the rear doors, double folding 60/40 rear seats, electrically adjustable heated door mirrors, adjustable heated front seats with power headrests and lumbar supports, front and rear fog lights, heated front windshield and rear windows, height-adjustable front and rear seat belts, ignition-off delay for the truck's windows and sunroof,

a trip computer and message center, a key-activated "all-close" feature, keyless entry, a security system, headlamps with power washers and wipers, tilt and slide glass sunroof and sunshade, micro-pollen filtration, programmable defrost auto-life warning, 120-watt AM/PM cassette with weather band and a full-size spare under the cargo area.

Wow! That's a lot. There is only one option: Rubber floor mats — and that'll cost you about \$200.

It's an expensive vehicle, this Range Rover. That's for sure. But buyers will get the most rugged luxury sport utility on the market. If you're in the mood for some fun, check this one out.

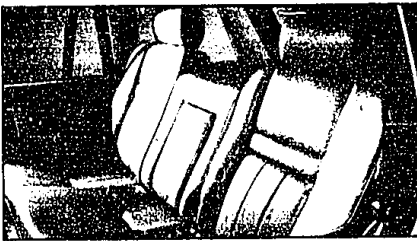
Anne Fracassa is senior editor of Avanti NewsFeatures.

1996 Range Rover 4.0 Vehicle class: Luxury sport utility, Power: 4.0-liter aluminum alloy V-8 engine.

Mileage: 13 city / 17 highway.

Price: \$55,000.

Where built: Solihull, England.



If you'd like to see a particular model tested or if you have a car question, send Anne Fracassa a message at AVANTI 1054, Avanti's America Online mailbox... Or comment through the Internet at AVANTI1054@aol.com

Anne Fracassa is senior editor of Avanti News Features.

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