

Discovery 3

Big softie or a clever disguise?

By Godfrey Castle

The new Discovery claims to be a vehicle completely unlike the previous models. We took it upon ourselves to test this claim and see if it's an off-roader at heart.



We got the call from a friendly Land Rover dealer in Cape Town, "Come on," said the salesman, "It's time *Caravan and Outdoor Life* tried the new Discovery 3 for towing - it's far superior to the Series One and Two Discoveries and will make a much better towcar."

"Land Rover made a big mistake with this new vehicle (ah - the used car dealer pitch!), they should have given it a new name - it's nothing like the old Discovery. Take it home for the night just for a try..." he added. "If you want it longer I can arrange this." (I should have seen it coming!)

Salesman's talk? Remember some of those quips from non Land Rover owners: "If a Landy isn't leaking oil it means it hasn't got any oil" and the bumper sticker declaring "Land Rover recovery vehicle"!

Now I know that you simply haven't lived if you haven't experienced the thrill of wildlife in the magnificent Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park, the sun rising over Namibia, the fynbos in the Cederberg - and this type of vehicle does open a whole new environment to caravaners and campers.

Sure, you could visit all these places in many other vehicles, but somehow a Land Rover carries an unrivalled, romantic overtone when it comes to going off the beaten track. And the Discovery 3 really does give you certain advantages.

For one you get permanent four wheel drive (you don't want to be concerned with getting bogged down in difficult terrain) and if a V8 petrol engine driving a permanent 4x4 worries you, then you have the option of a diesel engine for economy and low down towing torque.

Its distinct box shape styling (though perhaps not as aerodynamic as its competitors) does offer class-leading interior space, which makes long distance travel a pleasure. This shape is also a plus for game viewing visibility - and if you need space for up to seven people it's nice to know that you have this facility!

Costing around R500 000 you may be justified in thinking that you have to be brave or stupid to want to get the new Discovery 3 dirty, or worse, scratched by those long, white razor sharp thorn trees!



"Somehow a Land Rover carries an unrivalled, romantic overtone when it comes to going off the beaten track"

A serious off-roader?

We have had two Discoveries in our test fleet over the years, ranging from the first (Series One) Tdi to the TD5 (yes, we opted for the oil burners because of the distance we travel and the savings in fuel, and also because they have enough torque to tow just about anything).

But, horror of horrors - when we first saw the new Discovery 3 we wondered if the designers had gone soft and produced a vehicle targeted at the city 4x4 wannabe's.

Such clean body lines, tinted windows, no spare wheel on the back door, no roof rack, no extra gear

lever to engage differential locks or low range gears - the Discovery 3 certainly had a lot to prove.

Going off-road is so easy with the new Terrain Response feature.

lever to engage differential locks or low range gears - the Discovery 3 certainly had a lot to prove.

If you park the Discovery 2 next to the new Discovery 3 the only resemblance may be the front round headlight clusters and the traditional kink in the roof line, which gives rear seat passengers a better view of the road ahead. The rest of the Discovery 3 is totally different: its body styling resembles (in my opinion) a box on steroids - it's all very straight, square and chunky.

What made me feel that this Land Rover is a complete break from past Land Rovers is that it is supplied with a little, somewhat puny scissors jack, which I suppose may be okay for city slickers, those who venture off the tar onto the occasional pavement or two. Personally, the jack would be the first aftermarket accessory I would purchase and replace.

A quick walk around the ●



TOP: Options of onboard satellite "talking" navigation and a display illustrating where your wheels are turned, which diffs are in use, and blue tooth for cellphone use.

TOP LEFT: Extra rear seats fold out of the floor if needed.

MIDDLE: Removable tow-hitch locks in place with a key!

TOP RIGHT: Terrain Response makes you into an off-road pro at the flick of a switch.

perimeter of the Discovery 3, kicking all four Michelin car looking tyres and taking time off to connect the removable towball onto a housing in the rear bumper, gave me some time to consider if this is a prettier car than the now older Td5 or Discovery 2?

But once I was behind the steering wheel and starting the engine my mind soon changed. With friends often referring to our TD5's diesel engine as "The Massey Ferguson" with rattles that had engine rebuilders sitting up with rand signs in their eyes, the new Discovery 3 is just the opposite.

The TDV6 is powered by a sister diesel engine found in the Jaguar S type. The only difference is that the Jaguar has twin turbo's compared to the Discovery 3's one, plus the Discovery 3 engine has been tweaked

for off-road use with the oil intake pipe modified to supply oil at severe angles of incline and decline. It also has a larger oil sump (8.6-litres). And it purrs like no other Land Rover I have ever known. The buy-out of Land Rover first by BMW and then by Ford a year later (in 2000) certainly has worked in the favour of the Discovery 3! And it is unlike any other Land Rover Discovery.

But how does it tow?

Who would ever have thought it possible for a Land Rover to be above average in a towing/hill climb competition?

With our national average of cars tested over the past few years showing an average time of one minute 41 seconds to cover the two kilometre mountain pass climb (Ou Kaapse Weg in the Cape, because it is just outside our offices), the Discovery 3 achieved a quick one minute 35 seconds towing our Jurgens Palma (1 380 kg). Big deal did you say? Just remember, the Discovery weighs in at two and a half tonnes (2 504 kg) and try and count the distance of six seconds when travelling at speed!

After re-checking the data, we

noticed that the big brother Range Rover holds our record of one caravan up this pass. In a world of conspiracy theories could we perhaps see a shot at land speed records from Land Rover?

The Discovery 3 has a number of other advantages for caravaners, such as self-levelling air suspension, which is a far cry from the older Discoveries which had somewhat lumbering, long travel, coil springs for taking up the bumps in freshly ploughed fields.

The new suspension provides a significant improvement in handling, especially while towing, it is now precise and taut while cornering and travelling at speed, and towing a caravan of this size is simply a pleasure.

The air suspension can be raised to increase the ground clearance for serious off-road work or lowered, so that it will allow the vehicle under normal garage doors or provide easier access by the elderly.

New engine

As a tower of caravans, my big delight is this new engine. Land Rover has introduced a number of innovations with this new V6 diesel. It uses common rail injection technology and operates at a higher pressure than most other engines (about 25% higher than average) so as to improve exhaust emissions and benefit performance and economy.

Maximum power is 140 kW at 4 000 rpm and a hefty 440 Nm of torque from only 1 900 rpm.

It is also one of the first diesel engines to use compacted graphite iron: Claimed to be lighter, stiffer, stronger and more durable than conventional cast iron.

The TDV6 diesel also runs with a relatively low engine compression of 17.3:1, yet there is no detectable turbo lag in acceleration from standstill. And low compression translates into low engine noise - you will simply have to ask if it's a diesel engine powering this Discovery, it's so quiet!

Manual transmission is an option on this model, our test car was equipped with a ZF "intelligent shift" electronically controlled six-speed automatic with slickness befitting a car costing as much as this.

Claimed to be one of the most

advanced automatic transmissions in the world, it not only offers normal automatic operation but also a "Sport" mode that alters the timing of gear shifts and throttle response. For those who like to override the automatic (that's me) there is what Land Rover call "Command shift": A flick of the automatic lever first sideways then forwards or backwards selects a higher or lower gear and holds this gear giving the driver full manual control of gear changes. Yet it won't allow overrevving of the engine and will always select first gear for take-off.

Off-road

Bad news for those off-roaders who enjoyed coming to a stop and then slamming through an extra gear lever for selecting high or low range when going off-road. It's now done by selecting the appropriate switch.

For the uninitiated the following may seem very technical, but in reality Land Rover has made going off-road as easy as walking past a chained up security dog, you know it can bite you, but it simply can't reach.

The Discovery 3 is fitted with Land Rover's new Terrain Response controls with diagrams on the knobs indicating the type of terrain you are wanting to travel over. Select one of the five appropriate settings, from general driving to one known as slippery conditions (this would be snow/gravel/grass) or three special off-road modes namely: Mud and ruts, sand or rock crawl and the car takes charge of everything bar reducing the tyre pressures for thick sand.

Other functions controlled by Terrain Response include ride height, engine torque response, Hill Descent Control (this automatically limits the speed going downhill), electronic traction control, transmission and differential settings.

The new electronic shift on the two-speed transfer box allows the selection from low range to high range while on the move. We did not try this ourselves, but we believe Land Rover!

The new Discovery 3 is also packed with other features depending on the model you choose (there are three variants, S, SE and HSE.) Options

vary from cloth to leather seats, electric power windows, an on-board navigation system that gives you verbal street directions, a diagram indicating which way your wheels are pointing and the mode you have selected, CD player and blue tooth for cellphone - a lot of motorcar.

Summary

This is anything but a traditional Land Rover, it's simply too powerful, too smooth, too comfortable, too upmarket and some might say too sophisticated for Africa's bush mechanics, should things go wrong.

It makes a great towcar and it will make a good off-roader out of any novice driver. It is also highly suited to the caravaning lifestyle in terms of go-anywhere appeal and interior space and very few vehicles in this class have the load bay capacity of the Discovery 3.

I would think, though, that a car costing this much should have a better jack and a roof rack!

Specifications

Towing Jurgens Palma	1 380
ENGINE	Diesel
Cylinders/capacity	6 / 2 720 cm ³
Power I.S.O. (kW/revs)	140 @ 4 000
Torque (Nm/revs)	445 @ 1 900
TRANSMISSION	Shift type auto
Drive wheels	Permanent 4x4
ACCELERATION (seconds)	
0-60 km/h	8.85 sec
0-80 km/h	12.78
0-100 km/h	19.53
Top speed towing	140 km/h
HILL CLIMB	
200m climb over 2 km	1 min 35 sec
OVERTAKING ABILITY (seconds)	
60-80 km/h	5.6
80-100 km/h	6.7
100-120 km/h	11.12
BRAKING	
60-0 km/h	2.4 sec
100-0 km/h	3.03
TOWBALL HEIGHT	
Towball height with caravan	410mm
(self-levelling air suspension)	
FUEL CONSUMPTION	
100 km/h	14.1l/100 km