

Road test: Land Rover Discovery

by Tim Saunders



A standing start to 60mph in a shade over six seconds and a mild electric hybrid are not something I usually associate with a Land Rover. Both of these achievements come with the Discovery S D300; a massive and capable 4x4. There are even seven seats.

Due to a lack of computer chips car manufacturing has really suffered; far fewer cars have been made and sold as a result. Yet this brand new striking bronze example is delivered to my door on a lorry. We all enjoy watching it being off loaded with such precision. 'I'm from the diplomatic corps,' the driver informs me. 'I usually work with politicians etc. but it's quiet at the moment so I thought I'd deliver this to you.' It is indeed a tough life being a humble journalist.

I try to reposition this beast on my sloping driveway with the children in the rear – probably not a great idea but this is my life. Lots of concentration is required especially when the sensors emit such ear-piercing sirens, which really are way too loud and I can't figure out how to quieten them down. They don't like the lavender bushes on the left or my wife's car on the right; both too close for their liking but you could easily squeeze a postman either side.

You look down on BMW X5s and Audi Q8s – as it should be. But the temperature controls seem to have been designed with a farmer in mind. Indeed Jeremy Clarkson will no doubt be at home here but I don't feel comfortable having to push the screen hard to get the heated windscreen or the air con on. Give me a knob like the one to turn the radio on and adjust the volume. Sadly all this technology is just too much; easily distracting the driver from his primary role of driving safely. As it is quite wide extra care is necessary. Fortunately my wife is on hand to deal with all this nonsense but try as she might she can't quieten the loud sat nav speaker who insists on saying 'modorway'. Also, the windscreen does mist up when it's raining – there are fine wires running through it that carry out that all important demisting function. But this type of screen is annoying. If I'm not careful I find myself focussing on these wires. Give me a clear screen.

Although the glovebox seems a little flimsy for a £63,000 vehicle, a supremely comfortable existence is enjoyed by all occupants, even those in the third row. The massive centre armrest in the front allows my wife to sit with her head resting on her hand. 'I never normally travel like this,' she says. 'But you can do it in the Landy.' Oh Landy, I better watch out, hadn't I? When cars get nicknames

they have already got under the skin. It's a smooth operator for sure.

Operating that third row of seats is a doddle, too. Henry (5) insists on sitting at the far back. 'Come on dad let's see how it works,' he urges. Pulling the second row forward allows access to the third row; each seat effortlessly pulled up from the boot floor, where they sit snugly if not required, giving a large boot space. It's all very quick and easy.

We travel to Wiltshire and notice that Landy even dwarfs Range Rovers, which is quite a surprise. We spy one in a farmer's field, which is of course the right place for it and are fortunate to find some green land where we can do some off-roading. Although there are off road functions I don't find it necessary to engage them; just point where you want to go and drive. Yes, it does feel that this vehicle will do whatever is asked of it whether it is the mundane weekly shop or climbing arduous hilly terrain. It's got little luxuries like heated front seats too, so no matter what the terrain comfort is paramount.

Once we have off-roaded, Henry gets the taste and wants to do it in every field that we pass. Throughout our time together we spy some open fields where we can further enjoy the Discovery's off-roading prowess.

The seven-seats allow us to pick up a family friend and take them on an outing, which of course we couldn't do in many other cars.

A slight drawback is the height of the vehicle when looking for parking. There are some car parks in Hampshire, notably in Locks Heath and Petersfield, that have bars above their entrances preventing tall vehicles like the Discovery from entering. So we park over the road instead. No great problem really as long as the driver remembers the height of the vehicle.

The sat-nav has a preference for motorways over country lanes. When we want to travel to Alresford it insists on taking us down the M27 and onto the M3 to get stuck in traffic rather than the pleasant country lanes around Cheriton, which incidentally are a lot quicker, too.

On a full 77 litre tank it will travel just over 600 miles, depending on your driving style of course. And it will always raise a smile.

Watch the videos at www.testdrives.biz

FACTS AT A GLANCE

Land Rover Discovery S D300 – 3.0L 300HP DIESEL AWD AUTO Mild Hybrid Electric Vehicle (MHEV)

Price as tested: £63,645 **Power: 300bhp**
0-60mph: 6.5secs **Economy: up to 42mpg**
Top speed: 130mph **CO2 emissions: 218–232g/km**

