



■ OLLIE FLETCHER

RANGE ROVER SPORT



Having driven the previous Range Rover Sport many times and knowing its flaws, I had high hopes for this new model.



For a start, it's 500kg lighter and uses 70% new components. It's lower, lighter and more athletic than before and is no longer built on the utilitarian Discovery's chassis; it has its own chassis adapted from the 'full-fat' Range Rover.

Although it's lower and sleeker, you still have to climb up into it, which has always been the appeal of Land Rovers. However, with the 'Access' suspension setting, the air suspension sinks right down and you can step into it rather easily.

Once inside, the entire cabin and interior is lavish yet robust and child-proof, and the ivory coloured leather seats in the top-spec 'Autobiography' model I drove were comfortable and looked just right. The back seats aren't quite as spacious as those in the full-fat Range Rover but there is still lots of room for three adults.

It's a pleasure to drive and the gearbox works well – you always have the feeling it's perfectly capable to drop a gear or two to overtake, but also to cruise in eighth gear on a long journey and take everything in its stride.

The new one isn't quite silky-smooth but is certainly much improved from the old model. It doesn't flop over to the side when cornering hard; instead it stays flat and feels sporty and agile – a bizarre sensation when you're sitting so high.

The only aesthetic problem I had with the previous car was the spare wheel cradle clearly visible and hanging down from underneath the rear of the car like a cow that had missed a milking. Thankfully now, it's recessed up into the body.

The base price of the Sport model and bigger Range Rover is £51,000 and £72,000 respectively. I really can't see what an extra £21,000 buys you apart from the status but they will appeal to different people. The base HSE model is well equipped too so you won't necessarily have to spend more on extra gadgets and toys.

But should you wish to, there are all sorts of luxury options available, from a vast panoramic sunroof and 23-speaker Meridian audio system to hardcore off-roading must-haves like steel bump plates, side bars and even a recovery winch.

Engines available are a 3-litre TDV6 (and in 2014, a diesel/hybrid) or a meaty 5-litre petrol V8 if you prefer your MPG to reach single figures. The TVD6 achieves around 35mpg which I would say is acceptable from a car weighing almost 2.5 tonnes.

It's a commanding car with go-anywhere, any time, every time capability and looks just right getting dirty off-road or cruising around the City streets.