

LAND ROVER DISCOVERY TDV6 S (M)

An air of quiet

MASCULINE LOOKS THAT SUGGEST IT WILL BROOK NO NONSENSE



If you want an industry success story, look no further than the Land Rover Discovery. And if you want proof of how well an iconic brand can stand up to a hiccup in product quality, then once again look no further than the Disco III. We tested the entry-level "S" model

Despite the indifferent international reputation of the Discovery II (in terms of reliability and quality), generation III of the Land Rover Discovery has far outstripped both sales expectations and demand. At the launch of this derivative – an entry-level "S" version with manual transmission – Land Rover SA revealed that in 2006 they sold 2500 units when they had expected to sell about 1800.

We think that with the addition of this model – which undercuts the two-pedal version of the TDV6 S by a massive R35 000 – they're going to have another good year.

At a glance, it looks like any other Disco: Big. Bluff. Imposing. And handsome in a masculine kind of way that suggests it'll brook no nonsense from rocks, mud pits, tree stumps, soft sand and slippery forest undergrowth. There's an air of quiet confidence about it that is hugely appealing.

FEATURES AND EQUIPMENT ****

Take a closer look at the newcomer and you'll notice the 17-inch wheels. There aren't any

front fog lights. The sunroof has disappeared. On the inside, air-conditioning replaces climate control and cloth replaces leather.

Front seats are manually adjusted and there are now five rather than seven seats: this is the key point of difference with the S – the two "occasional" seats in a third row are dispensed with.

What's also important is what's retained. Unlike a baseline Disco sold in the UK, our "cheapie" retains two critical systems: height-adjustable air suspension and Terrain Response – a matrix of pre-programmed settings which optimise the various drivetrain systems for different conditions.

ACCOMMODATION ****

Getting into a 4x4 can be a problem, but the Disco shows how it crosses the divide between conventional vehicle and SUV with its air suspension, which lowers the vehicle's body so that children and the not-so-agile can easily climb aboard. Once the vehicle is

up to speed, the suspension automatically reverts to the default ride height.

There's a rugged look and feel to the cabin, Landy successfully mixing the functionality of an off-roader with the fashion appeal that remains important in this sector. There are many storage places, including a massive lidded compartment between the seats and generous door pockets with mouldings for a water bottle.

The handbrake takes the form of a button, engaging electronically and disengaging automatically when the vehicle is driven off. A handbrake that can't be modulated precisely for hill starts may not be to everyone's liking, but we found that it works a treat, with just the right amount of resistance before releasing.

The centre console is thus freed up for other duties, most importantly for the placement of toggle controls for selecting ride height and choosing high/low range. There is also a bright yellow button to activate hill descent control, which now prescribes a dif-

confidence



The entry-level "S"-badged Discovery is more affordable, but comes sans front fog lights or sunroof. Take a closer look at the newcomer and you'll also notice the 17-inch wheels.



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ferent limit in each gear. Finally, there's the rotary switch with its five settings for Terrain Response.

The front seats proved to be superbly comfortable, occupants managing perfectly well without electric adjustments, thank you very much. Visibility is very good and the driving position is commanding, with the Landy's bluff extremities easy to judge. Having said that, drivers will soon realise there is a fair amount of bodywork/bumper ahead of that square-edged, clamshell bonnet!

The headrests of the front seats incorporate grab handles for those in the rear – handy when the going gets rough. In normal driving, rear occupants will find the seats very comfortable – once the rear headrests have been suitably adjusted – and the accommodation is spacious in all planes.

The backrests fold flat easily (once the cushions have been tipped forward) thanks to headrests that barely extend above the height of the seat when not in use.

The luggage area is positively huge, and accessed by a horizontally split hatch. This means the lower section becomes a handy work surface, but simultaneously restricts access to the nether regions of the boot somewhat.

However, the regular shape and low floor makes the luggage compartment ideal for a wide variety of loads and, of course, with the 60/40 back seat folded, there's impressive utility space. Netted side compartments, lidded storage bins, chrome tie-downs and a retractable cover allow owners plenty of scope when it comes to carrying anything from fresh eggs to dirty biking gear.

The spare wheel is slung under the vehicle, while under the boot board there's a comprehensive tool kit, and the removable towbar.

PERFORMANCE ****

The V6 engine, while it measures just 2,7 litres, certainly punches above its weight. There's 140 kW to be had, along with 440 Nm of torque – the latter at 1900 r/min.

Keep it above 1750 r/min and there's always plenty of forward urge, though like many turbodiesels the torque drop-off below that point is quite sudden. But on and off road you soon learn what gear you're going to need to ensure that it is in the powerband, and then it is very responsive.

At a true 120km/h the tachometer is reading 2200 r/min, and we cruised for hours on end with nary a downshift, the engine

incredibly smooth and refined, a prod of the accelerator usually enough to maintain momentum on uphill.

Our steady speed fuel test returned a figure in the mid-nines per 100km, and even after 1000km of mixed driving (including all Gerotek testing) the slightly optimistic computer readout indicated just under 10 litres per 100km – very impressive for a 2500kg brick.

Leap on the brakes and the Disco pulls up with assurance, weight transfer to the nose largely quelled by the air suspension, and all-wheel ventilated discs allowing for repeated abuse without complaint.

With a 150kg advantage over an automatic transmission TD6 SE (*Leisure Wheels* 33) this model enjoyed a slight time and distance advantage.

It was also a bit quicker through the gears, reaching 120km/h in 18,5 seconds – a speed that can just be achieved in third gear if necessary.

The gearbox, unsurprisingly, has a heavy action and is much more satisfying to use when it isn't rushed, though quite some effort is needed to push it home into each gear. Select the sixth and final ratio and keep your foot flat and the Disco will go on to man-

age a top speed of 188 km/h – about 7 km/h up on the auto.

Despite having 17-inch wheels, overall gearing is the same as those models on eighteens, with this version fitted with taller 235/70s rather than 255/60s.

RIDE AND HANDLING

If there's an SUV that rides and handles better, please point us to it. While deleting air suspension and Terrain Response would probably slice a chunk off the retail price, retaining it has resulted in superb manners on and off the road.

With its arsenal of software and hardware the Disco is pretty much unrivalled in dirt, and between the launch and our regular test session we drove it in a wide variety of conditions. And in all honesty we couldn't find much to fault, and for those who want their off-roading to be challenging but not terrifying, we have to say that this is the answer.

Yet once back on tar, velocities that would normally elicit a terse response from the passenger seat can be maintained with ease, the more compliant tyres not only soaking up the bumps easily, but seeming to do a better job of isolating road noise.

Yet when the road deviates from the straight and narrow, the Disco reveals another side to its personality: it turns into bends obediently, holds its line with ease and stays surprisingly flat even when the cornering loads build up.

It's not going to outrun the likes of a Legacy Outback through Hennops River Valley, but body control is excellent and holding course on narrow tarmac isn't the white-knuckled affair it can be in hardcore SUVs. The steering is also surprisingly generous in its feedback, while on dirt it has just the right gearing. A turning circle of 11,8m isn't too shabby, either.

VERDICT

The Discovery will have been on the local market for more than 18 months by the time you read this, yet in that period nothing has

QUICK GLANCE

For: Sharp price, user-friendly off-road technology, space, refinement

Against: Heavy duty gearbox

Verdict: Best Discovery saved until last

Price: R 415 000

Service intervals: 20 000km

Warranty: Three years/100 000km

NICE TOUCHES

- "Clip-on" towbar
- Lidded storage in flanks of luggage compartment
- Non-slip oddment trays

NIGGLES

- Single shot CD only
- No rear power point

Competitors

Nissan Pathfinder 2.5DCi LE
Toyota Land Cruiser Prado 3.0DT

R407 500
R419 800

come along that can seriously challenge it as a serious SUV that also needs to be used every day.

Sure, it is big, and maybe too heavy (Land Rover is not the only offender in that regard) but it does a lot of things really well – even those things that one would expect to reveal a chink in its armour.

Being able to own everything that a Disco represents – both emotionally and objectively – for R415 000 is going to make this model hugely popular.

LAND ROVER DISCOVERY TDV6 S

ENGINE

Type	Longitudinal, V6
Valvetrain	DOHC, four valves per cylinder
Displacement	2720cc
Bore x stroke	81 x 88mm
Max power	140 kW @ 4000 r/min
Max torque	440 Nm @ 1900 r/min
Fuel supply	Common-rail fuel injection, turbo-charged

CHASSIS AND BODY

Layout	Front-engined, permanent 4WD with low range
Frame	Ladder frame chassis
Brakes	
Front	Ventilated discs
Rear	Ventilated discs
ABS/EBD/BAS	Yes/Yes/Yes
Wheels	17-inch alloy
Tyres	235/70
Steering	Power assisted rack and pinion
Turning circle	11,8m
Suspension	
Front	Independent. Lower control arm, air spring/damper unit, anti-roll bar
Rear	Independent. Double wishbone, air spring/damper unit, anti-roll bar

DRIVETRAIN

Transmission type	6-speed man.
Traction/stability ctrl	Yes/yes
Limited slip diff	Yes
Differential lock	Yes
Full-time 4WD	Yes

DIMENSIONS

Mass as tested	2490kg
Length	4740mm
Width	1850mm
Height	1865mm
Wheelbase	2850mm
Front track	1570mm
Rear track	1570mm
Fuel tank	82 litres

PERFORMANCE

Top speed	188 km/h
Acceleration	
0-100 km/h	12,7 sec
0-120 km/h	18,5 sec
Flexibility	
60-100 km/h (4th)	9,7 sec
60 - 100 km/h (5th)	15,6 sec
80 - 120 km/h (4th)	9,9 sec
80 - 120 km/h (5th)	12,7 sec
Fuel consumption	
9,56 l/100 km @ 120 km/h	
Range @ 120 km/h: 857 km	
Braking (80 - 0 km/h)	
Best	25,6 m & 2,28 sec
Average	25,9 m & 2,44 sec

STANDARD EQUIPMENT

Foglamps f/r	No/Yes
Height/reach adj steering	Yes/Yes
Height adj driver's seat	No
Tuner/CD player	Yes
CD shuttle	No
Air-con/climate control	Yes/No
Satellite navigation	No
Electric windows f/r	Yes/Yes
Adj exterior mirrors	Yes
Remote central locking	Yes
Cruise control	No
Alarm/Immobiliser	Yes/Yes
Leather upholstery	No
Driver/passenger airbags	Yes/Yes
Sidebags/curtain bags	Yes/Yes
Belt pre-tensioners f/r	Yes/No
ISOFIX seat attachments	Yes
Roof rails	No
Tinted windows	Yes
Full-sized spare wheel	Yes
Luggage cover	Yes
Towbar	Yes
Electric sunroof	No

OFF-ROAD

Approach	35,9 °
Departure	26,6 °
Ramp breakover	155,1 °
Ground clearance	235 mm

Road Test Editor **ADRIAN BURFORD**

TEST DATA COMPILED AT THE GEROTEK PROVING GROUNDS • PERFORMANCE DATA AND OFF-ROAD MEASUREMENTS PROVIDED BY ROADWORKS CC