



# Rover 400 Saloon

Featuring 2.0SDi



## What's different?

Saloon alternative costs no more than hatch and two-litre petrol costs same as 1.6; £500 more for diesel, but better equipment for 1998 makes complete range better value than before.

**R**OVER'S 400 RANGE IS SIZED TO APPEAL to both lower-medium and upper-medium (eg Escort and Mondeo) buyers. This saloon is 17cm longer than the five-door outside, but this doesn't translate into more occupant space, though the boot is bigger and the 60/40 rear backrest still folds forward (although the cushion doesn't). You also get the safety benefit of a three-point inertia-reel seatbelt for the fifth passenger, but there was no centre armrest or rear head restraints even with our latest Si trim level. Actual back seat support is a bit better in the saloon than in the hatch but is still somewhat lacking.

The five-door starts with the 1.4/103bhp K-Series engine, but this isn't on offer in the saloon. We had the opportunity to sample the two-litre and diesel versions. The latter in its lower-powered guise, produces 86bhp; its turbocharged, direct-injection

engine is essentially the same as the 105bhp version, but uses a mechanical rather than an electronically controlled injector pump and has no intercooler.

What impressed us with this installation was that the engine sounded quieter and more remote from the cabin than the 600 version we sampled last year. Shunt is also notably absent in either state of tune if drivers are clumsy with their footwork, but the 105bhp version is louder, more prone to growl when pulling away from street corners and vibration below 1500rpm means a 30mph minimum in fourth; beyond 3000rpm, there's no mistaking that it's a diesel. Long-legged gearing gives 80mph in fifth before this sound barrier is imminent, so cruising on our motorways is no problem.

The acceleration figures clearly represent a massive improvement over those of the previous direct-injection Pekins/MDi engine used in the Montego and Maestro, but sad to say, the mpg figures are worse. After all this design effort, we have to report that the new L-Series does no better in this respect than indirect-injection rivals from Ford and Peugeot-Citroën – as our comparison table shows.

A close relation to this diesel is the T-Series petrol version, using common tooling and sharing the same bore and stroke. Developing 136bhp, it, too, uses

*Continued on page 3*

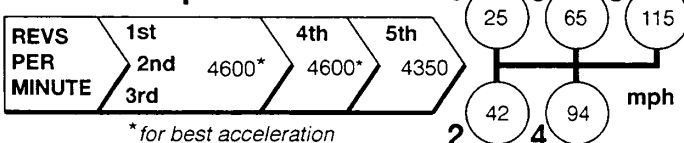
**PERFORMANCE**

**Acceleration** time in seconds

mph	30	40	50	60	70
<b>THROUGH THE GEARS</b>		1.7	4.3	7.2	11.3
<b>IN 5TH GEAR</b>		8.9	15.1	20.5	26.6
<b>IN 4TH GEAR</b>		4.2	8.0	11.9	16.2

20 mph	30	40	50	60	70
<b>5TH/4TH SPEED RANGES</b>		20.6/10.8		11.6/7.7	
			15.1/8.0		11.5/8.2

**Maximum speeds**



**FUEL CONSUMPTION**

Fuel grade for tests: diesel

Normal range	mpg
Hard driving, heavy traffic	36
Short journeys in the suburbs	42½
Motorway – 70mph cruising	44
Brisk driving, mixed roads	49
Gentle driving, rural roads	57
<b>Typical mpg overall</b>	<b>47½</b>
Realistic tank range*	44 litres/460 miles

\* based on fuel gauge, warning lamp and filling station experience

**FOR THE TECHNICAL**

**ENGINE**

**Type** front-mounted, transverse four in line. Iron block and alloy head; five main bearings

**Size** 84.5 x 88.9mm = 1994cc

**Power** 105bhp at 4200rpm

**Torque** 155 lb ft at 2000rpm

**Valves** single (belt-driven) overhead camshaft actuating two valves per cylinder via hydraulic tappets

**Fuel/ignition** turbocharged and intercooled direct-injection diesel with two-stage computer-controlled mechanical injection-pump. EGR and two-way exhaust catalyser; 55-litre fuel tank, with low-level warning lamp

**TRANSMISSION**

**Type** five-speed manual, front-wheel drive

**Mph per 1000rpm** 26.5 in 5th, 20.3 in 4th

**CHASSIS**

**Suspension** front: independent double wishbones, coil springs, anti-roll bar. Rear: multi link with coil springs and wishbones. Gas-filled telescopic dampers all round

**Steering** rack and pinion with hydraulic power-assistance; 3.2 turns between full locks. Turning circles average 11.4m between kerbs, with 18.1m circle for one turn of the wheel

**Wheels** 5J steel with 185/65R14T tyres standard; optional 5½J alloys with 195/55R15H (Pirelli P6000) on test car (full-sized steel spare)

**Brakes** ventilated discs front, solid discs rear with engine-driven servo pump and standard electronic ABS

**SAFETY AND SECURITY FEATURES**

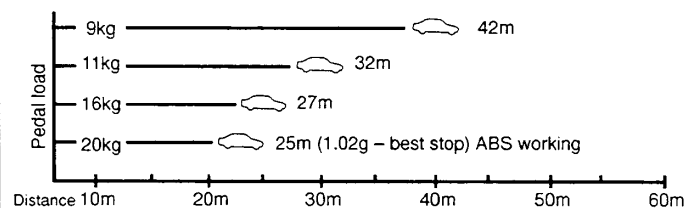
Assessed on their effectiveness and convenience (the more black blobs the better)

<b>Seatbelts</b>	front ●●●○○	rear ●●●○○	<b>Door locking</b>	●●●○○
			central locking?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<b>Head restraints</b>	front ●●○○○	rear <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	remote control?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
			auto window closure?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<b>Interior</b>			deadlocks?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
safety padding	●●●○○		<b>Luggage</b>	
driver's airbag?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		secure from interior/hidden	●●○○○
other airbags?	<input type="checkbox"/> (1)		from view	●●○○○
side impact protection	●●●○○		<b>Alarm</b>	●●●○○
<b>Fuel anti-spillage</b>	●●●○○		engine immobilised?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> standard on test car	<input type="checkbox"/> factory fitted option	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> not available		

**BRAKES**

Pedal feel ●●●●● Behaviour in an emergency ●●●●● Handbrake ●●○○○

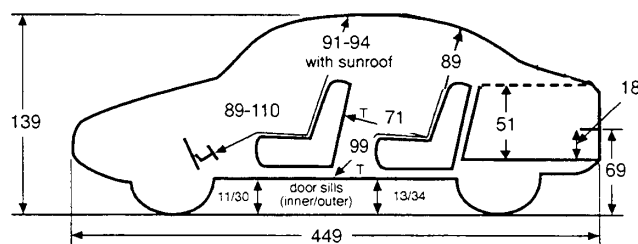
Dry road stopping distance from 50mph (with ABS)  
(A good-to-average best stop is about 28m at 20-30kg pedal load)



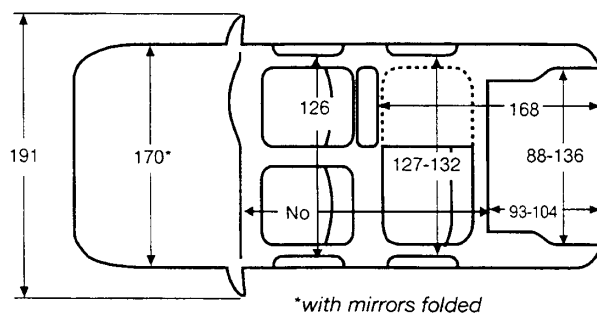
Fade test: pedal load required for a moderate (34m/.75g) stop:  
10½kg at start of test, 13kg at end of test. (Ideal brakes show no change)

**MEASUREMENTS**

Centimetres



T: typical back seat space behind medium-sized front occupants



reasonably tall gearing (22.5mph per 1000rpm in top) and, frankly, we were surprised how smooth and refined it feels in the 400, with a “knife-through-butter” gearshift to match. It also revs well and represents a significant advance over the old O-Series Montego two-litre, on which it’s based.

In our earlier test report on the 1.6 five-door, we thought there was a disparity between its higher-than-average price and the standard equipment provided. The 1998 versions look better value, with the Si/SDi mid-range variants now offering most of the items we previously noted by their absence (cushion height and lumbar adjusters, seatbelt pre-tensioners, interior beam trimmer, electric mirrors). Two important additions for 1998 are standard ABS and air-conditioning, while the sheer relief of an automatic self-cancelling immobiliser, when you turn the key in the ignition, will be the envy of existing owners. It’s a pity the requisite handset has to dangle down and keep touching the driver’s knee, however.



## VERDICT

You’re currently asked to pay about £1000 more for the 400SDi compared with the European competition, similarly equipped (give or take an electric window here or an airbag there). Despite similar dimensions, a BMW 325tds will set you back 40 per cent more, whereas the old Maestro bowed out at 40 per cent less. In a world where image counted for nothing, such comparisons would make more sense, but, of course, in today’s market place even diesel cars can have kudos, with a commensurate price tag.

We freely admit to being susceptible to the Rover 400’s charms; whether they’re the visual kind or those of the superb ride and handling, steering and brakes, this is a car endowed with considerable talent. This diesel is also good, but it’s not the best of the new breed of direct-injection diesels, however, and at these prices, you have a right to expect the best.

### Likes . . . and gripes

Front seatbelts particularly comfortable	. . . but can be hard to fasten
Seat height adjuster useful	. . . but cushion won’t go low enough for tall drivers
Remote radio controls on wheel	. . . but too much bass bias
Cool air to facia vents with heater on	. . . but poor mixing creates cold footwell draughts
“Drive-by-wire” accelerator avoids clumsy engine shunt	. . . but too much initial dead movement
Electrically adjustable and heated door mirrors fold flush	. . . but poor over-the-shoulder vision
Reasonable tank range	. . . but alarmist low fuel lamp/gauge

### HOW the 420SDi COMPARES

	Engine cap/power (cc/bhp)	Revs at 70mph (rpm)	30-70mph through gears (sec)	30-70mph in 5th/4th gears (sec)	Fuel economy (mpg)	Brakes best stop (m/kg)	Maximum legroom – front (cm)	Typical leg/kneeroom – rear (cm)	Steering (p) turns/circle (m)	Overall length (cm)
ROVER 420SDi (4-door)	1994/105	2640	11.3	26.6/16.2	47½	25/20*	110	99/71	3.2/11.4	449
VW Vento 1.9TDi (4-door)	1986/90	2430	11.7	23.2/16.3	61½	29/17	112	97/71	3.2/10.1	438
Proton Persona 2.0TDi (4-door)	1998/80	3010	13.9	21.5/16.6	41	31/16	108	96/70	2.8/10.7	436
Ford Escort 1.8TD (4-door)	1753/88	2800	12.6	24.6/15.3	48	27/34*	107	100/70	3.0/10.4	423
Peugeot 306 1.9TD (4-door)	1905/92	2780	11.7	23.9/16.0	47½	29/18	105	94/67	3.2/10.7	424
BMW 325TDS (4-door)	2498/143 <sup>(6)</sup>	2500	8.9	21.5/14.6	39	26/16*	112	98/70	3.4/9.9	443
Austin Maestro 2.0TD (5-door)	1994/81	2600	13.6	40.8/24.0	54	27/22	102	100/69	3.5/10.5	400

(6) six cylinder

\*with ABS

(p) all power-assisted