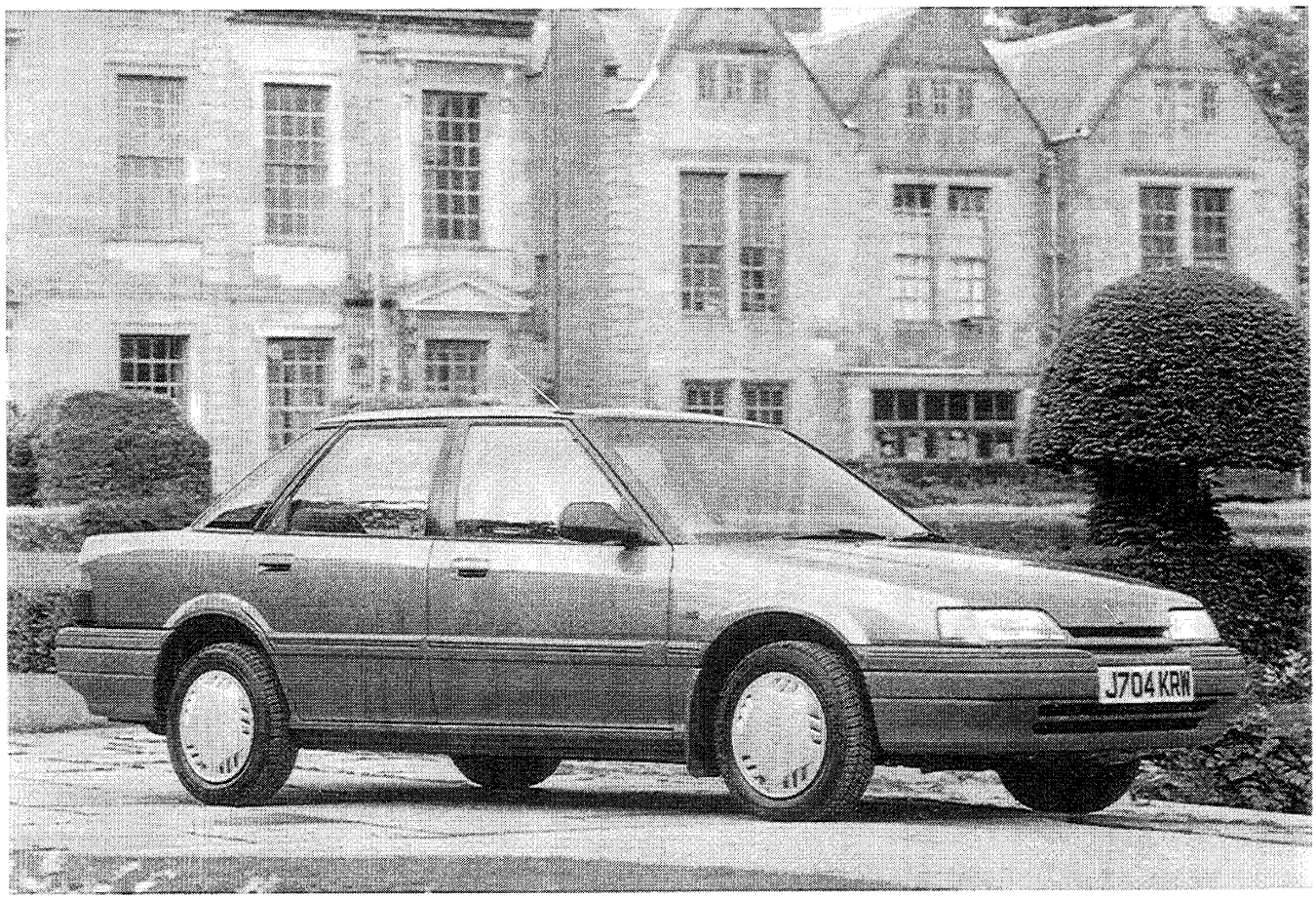
AA Car test

June 1991
Supplements R9005, R9133A, R9118A

Rover 418SLD Turbo



NOT ONLY DOES ROVER OFFER THE MOST frugal diesel in the upper medium class, with its unusual direct-injection Montego Turbo, it's now pitched in with two diesel versions of the 200/400 smaller family car.

However, nothing is shared between the Montego and the new Rover models – the latest duet is Peugeot-inspired and this turboed version, complete with intercooler, has similar machinery to that found under the bonnet of certain types of 309, 405 and Citroën BX. Report R9113 covers the cheaper and lower-powered (yet larger-capacity) SD, on offer in the five-door 218.

The latest test car was a 418 saloon, although it has a hatchback counterpart. At present, you can't have a saloon version of the SD, only a turbo version. It's not cheap, either; all the alternatives listed in our comparison table cost less – even the bigger Montego.

Rover is currently trading heavily on the success of the 200/400-Series and its undoubted aura of quality. Nevertheless, it's still a smaller car than the Montego, although this four-door saloon's back seat comfort and headroom are better than the hatchback's.

So, does it prove to be resoundingly superior to these cheaper alternatives we've listed? In statistical terms, the table shows that it doesn't. This 418 is heavy for its size and fails to deliver the better acceleration, compared with the Peugeot 309, that its specification may promise. Then again, it did no better than the unturbocharged 218SD in our fuel consumption tests, which leaves it trailing the Montego and Golf by a significant margin.

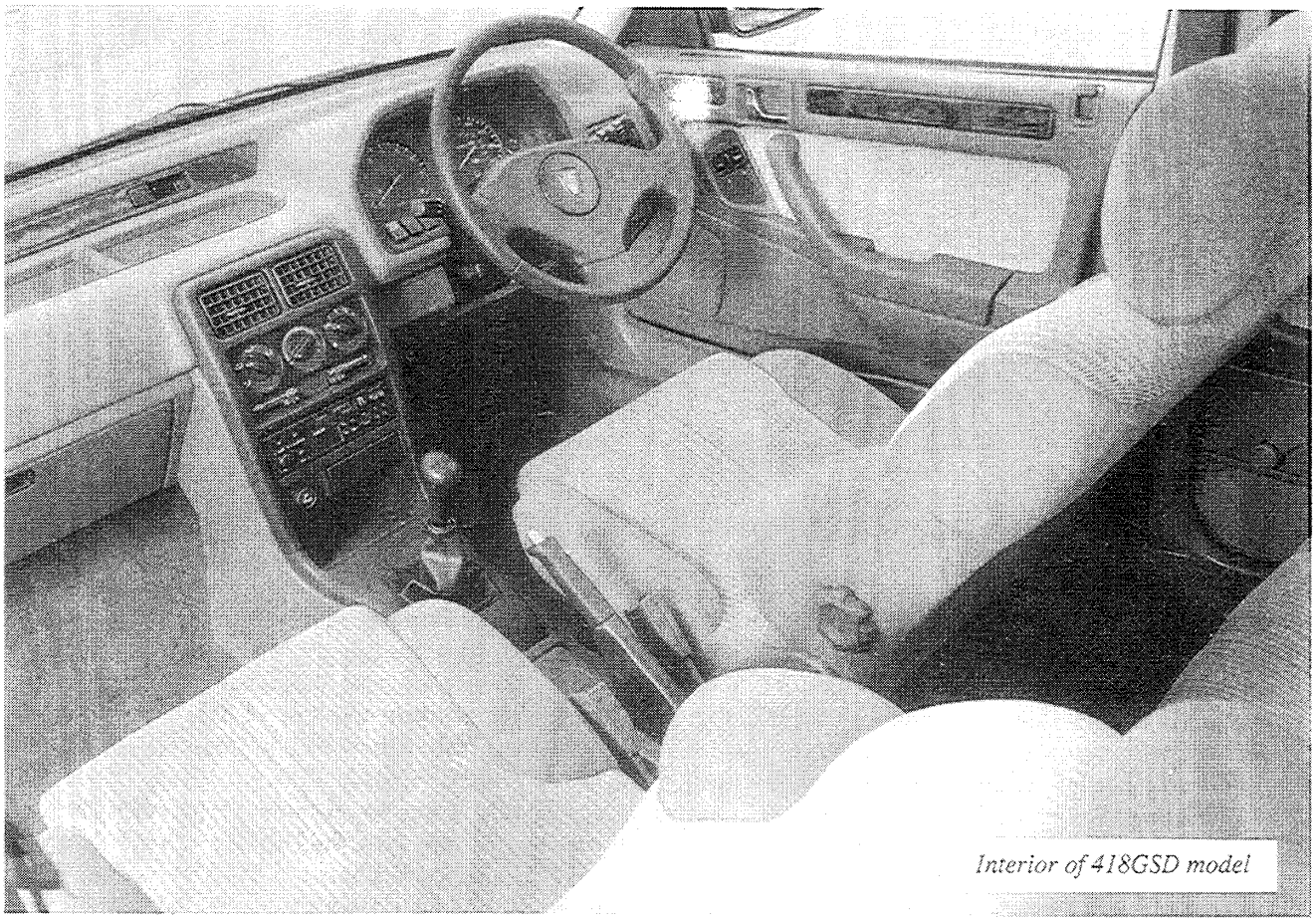
But to disqualify it for the sake of figures is to miss the point. Of course, Rover is well aware that the direct injection Perkins engine in the Montego and Maestro is more efficient. The reason for it acquiring the Peugeot power unit was to obtain the mechanical refinement it sought for its upper-crust model. (It would be all wrong to have the walnut veneer vibrating in sympathy with a vibrant lump under the bonnet!) In this turbo version, the ploy has paid off handsomely. It's quieter, better installed to avoid

'shunt' and generally feels really user-friendly. All right, diesel rattle is still audible from outside, particularly on cold starts, but inside the car, it's easy to forget that this is a diesel and on a motorway it cruises more quietly than any petrol version.

The extra weight has produced a bonus, too – this 418's ride felt much less flurried over undulations that agitate the petrol versions. The power steering is a bit heavier on the open road, and the car doesn't respond quite so adroitly when hustled through the bends. It feels more dignified, which is totally in keeping with what's under the bonnet. Even the accelerator linkage is lower geared – so you press the pedal more to get some action – but this means there's no lurch in slow traffic.

The real deficiency of turbocharged diesels is that the strong acceleration is available only over a narrow engine speed band; in this case, the push comes around 2500rpm and is all over before the governed 4500 maximum. One has to learn how to drive on the gearbox and tacho, to keep the power flowing. Two consolations, however, are the delightful gearchange quality (better than a 414's) and the vibration-free pulling, even if you allow the engine speed to drop too low. It may accelerate languidly, but it's smoothness remains exemplary.

After a thousand miles of testing, we learned to like this 418 turbo-diesel a lot. It's an excellent proposition for the private buyer, perhaps of more mature years, who always seems to figure prominently in Rover's 200-Series market profile. It's the sort of car that's much better than a cold survey of its statistics might lead you to think. There are cheaper rivals which are faster and more frugal in the diesel scene, but faithful to the Rover tradition, this is the one with a touch of class.



Interior of 418GSD model

HOW IT COMPARES	Engine cap/power (cc/bhp)	Maximum speed (mph)	30-70mph through gears (sec)	30-70mph in 5th/4th gears (sec)	Fuel overall (mpg)	Brakes best stop (%g/lb)	Maximum legroom – front (in)	Typical leg/ kneeroom – rear (in)	Steering turns/ circle (ft)	Overall length (in)
Rover 418SLD Turbo	**1769/87**	**104**	**14.7**	**31.4/19.6**	**45**	**86/40**	**42½**	**39/28**	**3.4/34 (p)**	**172**
Peugeot 309GRDT	1769/78	103	14.9	26.8/18.5	49½	87/40	42	38½/28½	3.3/33½ (p)	159½
VW Golf 1.6CL Turbo-diesel	1588/80	102	12.7	26.0/19.0	54	95/55	42	38/28	3.7/33½	157
Rover Montego 2.0D SLX	1994/81	102	14.3	44.5/27.5	53	101/48	42	40½/28½	3.5/36 (p)	175¾
Rover 214SD	1905/66	95	19.2	35.5/25.8	45½	86/40	42	39/28	4.0/34	166¼
										(p) = power assisted

PERFORMANCE

Acceleration time in seconds

STANDING START	0-30mph	0-60mph	¼ mile
	4.2	13.4	19.5

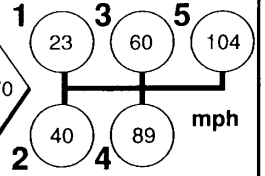
mph	30	40	50	60	70
THROUGH THE GEARS	2.2	5.4	9.2		14.7
IN 5TH GEAR	10.2	18.2	24.4		31.4
IN 4TH GEAR	5.7	9.7	14.0		19.6

20 mph	30	40	50	60	70
5TH/4TH SPEED RANGES	22.0/12.7		14.2/8.3		
		18.2/9.7			13.2/9.9

Maximum speeds

REVS PER MINUTE	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th
		4350 *		4450	3970

*for best acceleration



FUEL CONSUMPTION

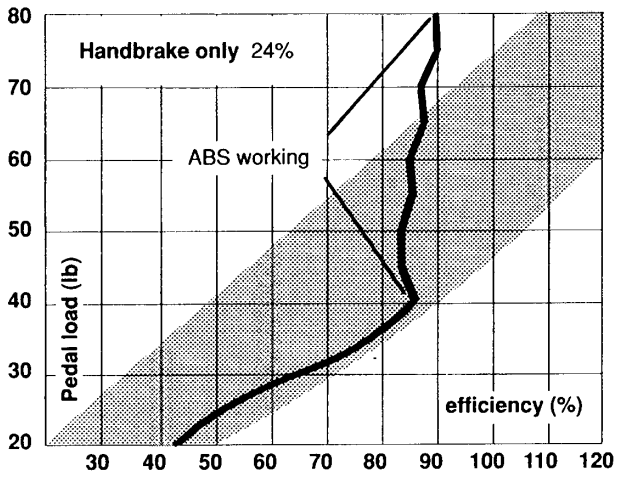
Fuel grade for tests: Diesel

Normal range	mpg
Hard driving, heavy traffic	33
Short journeys in the suburbs	39½
Motorway – 70mph cruising	42
Brisk driving, mixed roads	46
Gentle driving – rural roads	55
Typical mpg overall	**45**
Realistic tank range*	43 litres/425 miles

based on gauge/warning lamp and filling station experience

SAFETY

Brakes How pedal loads affect braking



Braking efficiency shown as a percentage of gravity (ie 100% = 1.0g)

Ideally the braking curve should fall within the shaded zone of this graph. If it's above, the brakes are too heavy; if it's below, they are too light – particularly on cars without ABS. When the curve becomes broken, the wheels are skidding.

Fade test

How hard use or water affects braking. (Ideal brakes show no change.)

Pedal load needed for 75% stop (lb)

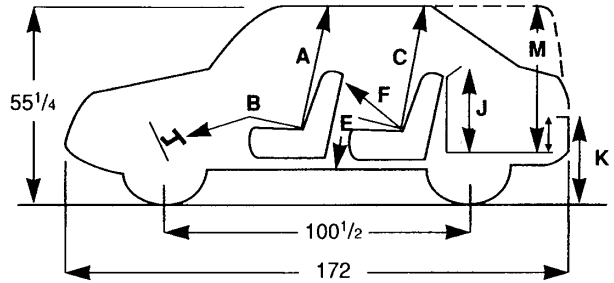
40	At start of test
32	After constant use
34	After severe use
NA	After watersplash
NA	Number of stops to recover

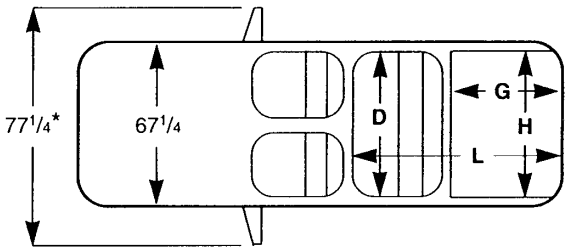
Safety check list

Steering true 'feel' of the road?	✘
Brakes powerful?	✘
sensible effort?	✔
fade resistant?	✔
Seatbelts front – effective?	✔
convenient?	✔
rears – effective?	✔
convenient?	✔
Head restraints front– effective?	✔
rear – effective?	✘
Interior thoroughly padded?	✔
Fuel shielded filler?	✔
protected tank?	✔

MEASUREMENTS

Dimensions (inches)





*69¾ with mirrors folded

Kerb weight in lb (full of fuel): 2620

Inside (inches)

A Front headroom	36½	**G** Load length	37½
B Front legroom (min - max)	35-42½	**H** Load floor width (min - max)	34¾-54
C Rear headroom	36½	**J** Load height	16½-18
D Back seat width (between armrests)	50½	**K** Sill height (inner/outer)	6¾/26
E Typical rear * legroom	39	**L** Load length	NA
F Typical rear * kneeroom	28	**M** Load height (to tailgate hinge)	NA

*'Typical' represents the mean measurement behind the driver's seat set at 39in legroom and the passenger's seat set at 41in

418GSD Turbo with optional extra alloy wheels

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

ENGINE

Type and size front-mounted, transverse 4 in line; water-cooled. 80mm bore x 88mm stroke = 1769cc. Iron block and aluminium alloy head; 5 main bearings

Compression ratio 22.0:1

Valve gear single (belt-driven) overhead camshaft actuating two valves per cylinder via shim-adjusted bucket tappets

Fuel system indirect injection diesel. Lucas-CAV Rotodiesel mechanical distributor pump with turbocharger and intercooler. 55-litre (12.1-gallon) tank; no low-fuel warning lamp

Ignition system compression ignition, with glow-plug preheating for cold starts

Maximum power (DIN-net) 87bhp at 4300rpm

Maximum torque (DIN-net) 133 lb ft at 2500rpm

TRANSMISSION

Clutch 8.5in diaphragm-spring, dry plate; cable-operated. Pedal load/travel: 28 lb/5½in

Gearbox 5-speed manual (all synchromesh) and reverse. Ratios: first 3.17, second 1.84, third 1.22, fourth 0.85, fifth 0.65 and reverse 3.00:1. (Automatic transmission not available)

Final drive 4.06:1, to front wheels

Mph per 1000rpm 26.2 in top, 20.0 in 4th

Rpm at 70mph 2670 in top gear

CHASSIS

Suspension front: independent by MacPherson damper/struts, coil springs, lower wishbones and an anti-roll bar. Rear: independent by trailing arms, twin transverse links, concentric coil spring/dampers and an anti-roll bar. Dampers: telescopic all round

Steering unassisted rack and pinion (standard). Optional power assistance on test car, with 3.4 turns between full locks. Turning circles average 34ft between kerbs, with 56¾ft for one turn of the wheel

Wheels 5½Jx14 steel with 175/70R14 84T tyres (Goodyear GT/70 on test car)

Brakes 10.3in ventilated discs front, 8in drums rear (standard) with Pierburg engine-driven servo pump. Optional Bosch ABS on test car, with 9.4in plain discs at rear