



2007 Land Rover LR3 HSE V8

From Jason Fogelson,

My experience behind the wheel of a Land Rover has been limited, so spending a week with the 2007 Land Rover LR3 HSE was an eye-opener. Known in Europe and around the world as the Discovery III, the 2007 Land Rover LR3 HSE carries a base price of \$53,235 (\$56,200 as tested), including a 4 year/50,000 mile warranty with free scheduled maintenance and an EPA estimate of 14 mpg city/19 mpg highway. I intend to discover what makes the Land Rover LR3 such an icon across the globe by taking it for a few spins around my local area.

First Glance

Larger exterior photos: Front Rear

The first Land Rovers were sold in 1948, and the company has ping-ponged from one owner group to the other ever since: From Leyland to British Leyland to Land Rover Leyland Group to Rover Group to British Aerospace to BMW. Land Rover has been part of the Ford Motor Company since the year 2000, part of Ford's Premiere Automotive Group that includes Jaguar and Aston Martin. Land Rover has always stood for off-road prowess. Picture a British hunter crossing Africa, and it's hard to imagine that khaki-clad sportsman traveling in any vehicle other than a Land Rover. Over the past ten years or so, the off-road reputation has been enhanced by an aura of luxury -- Land Rover is the vehicle of the aristocracy. It's how Lords and Ladies (and rap stars) travel to their country estates.

Don't try to fit into any round holes with the LR3 -- this is one square peg of an SUV. LR3's most recognizable feature is that big greenhouse, a holdover from the original Discovery model of 1989. Most unique is the bi-level tailgate, higher on the left side than on the right. It's more than a design feature, it's a practical advantage, lowering the lift-over height for cargo on the right side, while retaining full length support on the left side. I really like the shape and the bold angles and corners. LR3 doesn't look like any other SUV on the road.

LR3 looks well-put together in every detail. Deep, rich paint; chunky, solid trim and badging; and 19" aluminum alloy wheels contribute to an assertive stance make LR3 an impressive sight.

In the Driver's Seat



The tinny, bare-bones feel of the original Discovery has been banished from the LR3's cabin, replaced by restrained elegance and subtle luxury. LR3 doesn't dazzle with real wood trim or high tech baubles, it simply puts everything in its place and waits for you to find it. Contrasting dark and light plastics dress the dashboard, with audio, navigation and climate controls concentrated in the center stack. GPS Navigation is standard on LR3, with off-road functionality. Land Rover assumes that you'll be straying from the mapped paved roads in your LR3, and they want to be sure that you can find your way back. I love LR3's Bluetooth interface -- because it actually worked with my cellphone.

Many many luxury extras are included as standard equipment on the LR3, like leather seats, tilt and telescope adjustable leather-wrapped steering wheel, power seats with memory, adjustable driver and passenger armrests, power sunroof, dual-zone climate control and rear compartment climate control. My test vehicle also came with a "Luxury Package" of options (\$1,750) that included adaptive front lighting and a center console cooling box -- great for transporting organs for nighttime transplant.

LR3 has a ton of glass all around, and overhead, too -- there's a big fixed glass roof panel (Land Rover calls it an "alpine roof"), so that greenhouse feels a bit like a terrarium at times. The high seating position and stadium seating in the second and third rows makes LR3 a fantastic sightseeing tour bus -- everyone has a great view, and a comfortable place to sit.

On the Road

My test vehicle was the top of the line LR3 HSE, which comes with only one engine and transmission choice -- a 4.4 liter V8 mated to a six-speed automatic with four-wheel drive. There's a V6 available in lower trim levels, but I found the power from the V8 (300 hp/315 lb-ft of torque) to be just enough for the massive 5426 lb LR3. Once the big engine gets all that mass moving, LR3 is surprisingly sprightly. It never felt top-heavy or tipsy to me, though I was aware of its high center of gravity on high-speed sweeping curves.

The really cool thing about LR3 is the high-tech Terrain Response System. There's a knob on the center console with some simple pictographs standing in for various road conditions -- General, Grass/Gravel/Snow, Mud/Ruts, Sand and Rock Crawl. A twist of the knob (under the right circumstances) delivers just the electronically controlled system settings to suit driving conditions. Terrain Response configures throttle response, shifting and gear selection, differentials and suspension. I've seen this system demonstrated off-road, and I've driven with it on short off-road courses -- it is simply amazing, giving LR3 go-anywhere chops with few equals. Learn to drive an LR3 properly, and obstacles shrink in your path. It's not the same kind of feeling as driving a Jeep Wrangler off-road -- the sense of accomplishment is muted by electronic intervention. But LR3 is one of the easiest, classiest ways to get from point A to point B when there are few roads in between.

Journey's End



Driving LR3 on a daily basis through the urban jungle, however, the obstacles are more financial. That V8 is very thirsty -- 14 mpg city/19 mpg highway may be achievable with gentle applications of the throttle, but I'm not capable of that kind of restraint. And I'd be remiss if I didn't mention Land Rover's questionable reputation for reliability. I didn't encounter any issues with my test vehicle, but LR3 consistently rates toward the bottom in terms of reliability on traditional owner surveys. Buyer beware. At the very least, make sure that your local Land Rover dealer is nearby, and has a friendly, knowledgeable service staff and a nice waiting room. You may find yourself visiting there during the warranty period.

There are other luxury SUVs to consider if you're thinking about an LR3. Chief among the competitors is the Toyota Land Cruiser -- a vehicle that has stolen Land Rover's thunder for much of its history. Land Cruiser's upscale corporate sibling Lexus LX 470 is also worth a look. The Germans have entered the battle in a big way with Audi Q7, Volkswagen Touareg, Porsche Cayenne, BMW X5 and Mercedes-Benz GL450 all staking their ground. Acura's MDX is a stylish road warrior, though it probably gives up a bit of off-road prowess to the rest of the field. If you're looking for a pure off-road monster, you can go anti-luxury with the Jeep Wrangler, and invest your savings in climbing gear and kayaks.

For that Land Rover ambiance in a luxury SUV with real off-road ability, though, there's no substitute for the LR3.