



Official name: Land Rover PLC

Brands: Land Rover, Range Rover.

Formerly owned by: Rover, British Leyland, BMW, then Ford.

Owned by: Tata Motors.

Current situation: Originally farm vehicles, Land Rovers are now a luxury brand. Under Ford ownership, efficiency improved but not quality: despite brilliant offroad ability, Land Rovers are generally overpriced, poorly built and unreliable. After years of losses (which contributed to Ford's near-bankruptcy), the Land Rover company made a small profit and was sold to Indian-based Tata Motors. Land-Rover is currently profitable, but much of this profit comes from China and is exceedingly vulnerable to economic downturn there.

Chances of survival: moderate.

Luxury carmakers are exceedingly vulnerable to economic slow-downs and Land Rover sales are reliant on the world being full of wealthy yuppies. Tata Motors is currently rapidly expanding its manufacturing capacity in order to meet high demand from China. This is a risky strategy, given the precarious state of the global economy. If things go bad in the key market of China, Tata is likely to join the long list of companies that burned their fingers on this iconic brand •



A brief commentary on Land Rover



IN 1948 the first Land Rover rolled off the assembly line. Conceptually based on the original American army jeep, the Land Rover was better suited to English conditions; it had a small, fuel economic engine and used existing Rover company parts.

After World War II, steel was in short supply but aluminium, no longer needed for fighter aircraft, was freely available. That's why much of the original Land Rover body was built using aluminium. Aside from saving weight, the aluminium didn't rust, so it became a permanent feature on many Land Rover models.

Even from the beginning, Land Rovers were noted for offroad ability; they were, and remain, class-leading. On the road, early Land Rovers were unpleasant, with their small, noisy engines and roly-poly handling. It was many years before the power of Land Rover's standard engines matched the needs of the owners, which is why many older Land Rovers have had DIY engine upgrades.



With the onslaught of cheap, reliable Japanese four-wheel drives, Land Rovers seemed as doomed as the rest of the British motor industry. However, the advent of the Range Rover and its offspring – the Discovery – saved the marque.





Overnight, Land Rover became a luxury car brand, like Rolls-Royce. Land Rovers and Range Rovers

became the preferred means of transport for aristocrats, stockbrokers and drug dealers alike.

Older Land Rovers – the ones that are actually used offroad by people who aren't yuppies – never really die. That has been their traditional strength; somehow or other, older Land Rovers almost always limp home. Which, by the way, doesn't mean that Land Rovers are, or have ever been, especially reliable. They're more like a troubled marriage that is continually patched up just as it approaches disintegration.

It's worse on the newer models: virtually all modern Land Rover models suffer from chronic unreliability combined with high repair costs. The BBC's *TopGear* magazine said it all: "If [there was] a formula that combined price with customer satisfaction, then the Range Rover would come stone last...It gets a 'very poor' rating in just about every single department of reliability."

We still love Land Rovers. They have a certain style and character that you'll rarely find in a Japanese offroader. They are also among the world's best offroad vehicles, when working. We just wish that the Land Rover people could make them reliable as well •

