



LUXURY. PERFORMANCE. STYLE.

2005 Land Rover LR3
Starting MSRP \$44,330

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Test Drives

Scale Mountains in Style

The all-new Land Rover LR3 is a welcome replacement for the Discovery, whose basic design dates back to 1989 and worked better off-road than on.

By Nicholas Kurczewski

The Land Rover LR3 combines go-anywhere capability of past Land Rovers with a level of sophistication usually reserved for the brand's ultra-luxury Range Rover models. A new 216-horsepower, 4.0-liter, six-cylinder engine has been added to the lineup. But considering that the portly LR3 weighs well over three tons, drivers looking for brisk acceleration might favor the 300-hp, V8-equipped SE and HSE models.

Land Rover touts the LR3 as the first product to be developed entirely under Ford Motor's ownership. Ford purchased Land Rover in 2000, so there's no reason to begrudge the American auto giant a few boasts regarding LR3 development. Frankly, the LR3 is a huge improvement over the outdated Discovery model it replaces. However, much credit is also due Land Rover and its long history of off-roader development, which began in 1947.

The first Land rover was designed as a versatile farm vehicle and was inspired by the U.S. Army Willys Jeeps that littered the British landscape after WWII. Over the years, Land Rovers were modernized, refined and made to appeal to a broader range of customers while maintaining their legendary ruggedness, both in style and mud-slogging capability. The LR3 raises luxury levels even further while retaining those core Land Rover attributes.

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Exterior



Many of today's vehicles, SUVs included, are sacrificing large windows and good outward visibility for a sleeker, almost hot rod look. Not the LR3. Like the best work of architect Philip Johnson — famous for introducing the International architectural style — glass dominates the design.

The chiseled look borrows heavily from past Land Rovers, but with modern flush-



fitting windows and details — like the headlights — that echo the flagship Range Rover. Ultimately, the LR3 is understated and handsome, avoiding the chromed-out appearance of an Infiniti QX56 or Lincoln Navigator.

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Interior

The LR3's cabin is airy, with tall side windows and — in the HSE model tested — three glass panels set into the roof. Only the front one opens, yet the effect is of a cabin with plenty of light and good visibility.

The dash and center console are well thought out, though the vast array of buttons might have you grabbing for the owner's manual before the keys. Interesting features on our HSE model include a voice command function that will tune in your favorite CD or radio station or even record up to ten 30-second notes — making written grocery-shopping lists archaic 20th-century curiosities.



Leather comes standard on both models, as does a handy split folding tailgate. The HSE model as tested came with an optional third row seating arrangement. While it's a chore to fold out, once in place there is room for average-sized adults back there. Controls for ventilation and stereo volume — with a jack for headphones — are located at every seat. Driver and front-passenger seats have front and side thorax airbags, while every row (including the optional third one) has side curtain airbags.

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Performance

Apart from conquering treacherous trails in the Amazon, the new LR3 is a worthy partner on much more prosaic adventures. The steering is precise, the response from its Jaguar-sourced 4.4-liter V8 is smooth and the ride is firm, though never jarring. Many competitors to the LR3, as well as its Range Rover sibling, employ what's called a unibody — a construction technique that uses the body of the vehicle, as opposed to an internal framework, to support the structure's load. For the LR3, Land Rover adapted traditional truck architecture, called body-on-frame — an internal framework supporting a non-load-bearing body — and incorporated a super-stiff structure similar to a unibody.



What this means to non-engineers is that the LR3 is a great drive. It's immeasurably more comfortable on-road than the model it replaces, according to one New York owner who was ready to dump his old Discovery with its charley horse-inducing seats and spongy suspension. By contrast, the LR3 accelerates like a sports car and rivals luxury sedans in comfort and refinement, he says.

The tradeoff is weight. Incorporating the stiffer unibody-type structure — which is what makes the LR3 so much more enjoyable to drive than the Discovery — added a lot of pounds, bringing the total to a whopping 7,121. Despite its stoutness, the LR3 feels surprisingly nimble and maneuverable in city traffic.

Besides the extra poundage, there's a fiscal price to be paid for the LR3's elevated luxury and performance. The 2005 LR3 lists for \$4,000 more than the 2004 Discovery S it replaces. Originally only available with a 4.4-liter V8 engine, borrowed from fellow Ford stablemate Jaguar, there is a new 4.0-liter V6 model for sale. While this lowers the base price of the LR3 by about \$5,000, it barely improves upon the V8's fuel mileage figures of 14 mpg city/18 highway.

During a mix of town and highway driving in an eight-cylinder HSE, we struggled to see anything more than 14 miles per gallon — not a pretty sight when a gallon of gas costs more than your morning mocha frappuccino. Blame the scale-busting curb weight, which begs for all 300 horses from the V8. However, fuel quibbles aside, acceleration is more than acceptable with the V8, while the standard six-speed automatic shifts smoothly and efficiently.

Outside of merely puttering around town, there's a toy chest of gizmos at the ready, providing grip in the foulest of conditions. Full-time four-wheel drive and a fully independent suspension are only the beginning. The LR3 is the first Land Rover to feature the company's sophisticated new suspension and drive-train technology called Terrain Response. Drivers select one of five settings via a rotary knob on the instrument panel: general driving, slippery surfaces (grass, gravel, snow), or one of three off-road modes (mud/ruts, sand and rock crawl). The system automatically adjusts ride height, suspension stiffness, engine torque, transmission settings, electronic traction control and hill decent control to tackle the terrain. Thankfully, the disc brakes are strong, easy to modulate and capable of bringing any adventure to a thrill-free stop.



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Is the LR3 for You?

Buy This
Vehicle If

You're looking for a large – though not super-sized – luxurious sport-utility with exceptional on-road manners and the capability to slog through the jungle without flinching.

Keep Looking If	Cost is a major concern. The LR3's sophisticated mechanicals and chassis come at a premium, listing for \$4,000 more than the 2004 Discovery S it replaces. The Infiniti FX35 and FX45 are competitive offerings at a lower price.
Who Fits?	The LR3 has height adjustable front seatbelt mounts and for a 5'9" driver the seating position is excellent, needing little adjustment for a comfortable reach to the steering wheel, pedals and dash mounted controls. Shorter drivers may at first feel overwhelmed by how large the LR3 seems behind the wheel, but great outward visibility builds confidence.
Options Worth Splurging On	For carting more than five people around, consider the Rear Seat Package (\$1,250), which gives third-row fold-flat seating with side-curtain airbags back there, along with some other items. You can add rear climate control for \$950.
Closest Competitors	BMW X5 (\$41,700), Mercedes-Benz M-Class (\$37,950), Infiniti FX35 (\$34,950 base), Infiniti FX45 (\$45,450), Cadillac SRX (\$38,340)

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