

4WD BUYERS GUIDE

LAND ROVER DISCOVERY 4

LARGE WAGONS

OTA has been running a Discovery 3 for the past four years, so we reckon we're in a good position to evaluate the improvements (and otherwise) incorporated in its successor, the Discovery 4.

The Discovery 4, or Version 3.2 if you will, is a worthy successor to what is to date the most awarded large 4x4 wagon in the world. The Disco 4 has already begun to accumulate 'best vehicle' gongs around the world. Land Rover's Discovery 4 sports powerful and efficient new engines, fresh exterior identity and an upgraded cabin.

In summary, the iconic exterior design has been updated, with smoother surfaces at the front, including a more aerodynamic bumper. New lights include LED technology front and rear, with optional bi-xenon lamps and cornering lights.



The interior is completely restyled, with a transformed dash and centre console, new seats and an array of new kit. User-friendly features available for the Discovery 4 include a portable audio interface, gradient release, tow assist and high beam assist. In addition, an optional five-camera 'surround' system allows for easier parking, towing and off-road manoeuvring.

Other Discovery 4 changes include new suspension components, revised steering, larger brakes, improved traction control and enhancements to the award winning Terrain Response system.

The two new engines are LR-TDV6 3.0 twin turbo diesel and LR-V8 direct injection petrol, but we reckon most OTA site visitors will focus interest on the diesel, which is why we borrowed two such Disco 4s in recent months and gave them a workout.

The three-litre, twin-turbo diesel has 600Nm of torque and 180kW of power, yet fuel consumption is claimed to be improved by nine percent. Our own Disco 3 2.7-litre, single-turbo diesel has averaged 10.4L/100km in a combined, town, country and off-road duty cycle over the past three years, with around half its accumulated 180,000km being bush and off-road travel.

On the same duty cycle the Disco 4 three-litre achieved 9.5L/100km, despite having much more performance than the 2.7 – itself no slouch. That's an 8.6 percent consumption improvement.

Significantly, the existing LR-TDV6 2.7 diesel, with 140kW and 440Nm, is retained. That's important for buyers who want to go seriously 'bush', because the three-litre comes with big brakes that dictate wheels of at least 19-inch diameter and there are very few bush-capable tyres available in that size and none with a 'light-truck (LT)' rating. The 2.7-litre model can be fitted with 17-inch wheels that can mount LT tyres.

For those who tow, a useful inclusion in the new Disco 4 is a program that monitors engine coolant temperature when the ambient exceeds 40°C, gradually decreasing air conditioner efficiency, rather than have the coolant temperature rise excessively.



The Disco 4 continues with the Disco 3's removable, lockable towing tongue housing and also comes with two pre-wired 12N and 12S trailer plugs as standard equipment. The Discovery 4 tongue housing is a new shape that doesn't obstruct spare wheel removal and fitment, and can be retro-fitted to the Disco 3.

The electronic stability control system in the Disco 4 'knows' when a trailer is connected, via a sensor in the trailer plugs, and modifies stability control actions to take account of it.

A standard mis-fuelling device is fitted into the diesel filler neck and triggers when an unleaded petrol nozzle is inserted, blocking the filler neck. A plastic tool is provided, to reset the blocking device.

As with the Disco 3 a snorkel can be fitted and removed without body surgery.

WHAT YOU GET

For the Australian market, diesel-powered Discovery 4s are available in three different specification levels.

DISCOVERY 4 2.7 TDV6

The 2.7 TDV6 standard specification includes cruise control; Terrain Response; electric park brake; cross-linked air suspension with automatic load levelling and multiple modes - access, normal, off-road and extended height; speed-proportional steering; rain sensing wipers; automatic headlamps; power adjustable, heated mirrors; 'puddle' lamps and foot well lamps; auto headlamps with power wash; rain sensors; front fog lamps; rear park distance control; tow pack; 18 inch, five-spoke aluminium wheels with 255/60 AT V-rated tyres (after-market 17-inch wheels and tyres will fit); automatic dimming interior mirror; dual climate control; five seats with cloth trim; leather trimmed steering wheel; Harman-Kardon audio system – nine speakers, subwoofer, radio, single slot CD player, auxiliary input; driver information centre; Bluetooth telephone connectivity ; power sockets - front, second row and rear; EBD, ABS, ETC, ESC, electronic differential control, roll stability control, trailer stability assist and HDC with gradient release control.

Airbags are full-size driver and front passenger, driver and front passenger side and head, and rear outboard passenger head airbags.

DISCOVERY 4 3.0 TDV6 SE

The next model in the line-up is the 3.0 TDV6 SE, featuring the all new diesel engine with advanced sequential twin turbochargers. In addition to the features found on the 2.7 TDV6, the 3.0 TDV6 SE comes with the following as standard specification: seven seats with leather trim; bi-xenon headlights with cornering lamps; 19-inch seven-spoke wheels with 255/55 AT V-rated tyres; power-fold mirrors; third-row head curtain airbags and map lamps.

DISCOVERY 4 3.0 TDV6 HSE

The 3.0 TDV6 HSE comes with the following as standard specification: navigation system (hard disc drive) with voice control and off-road mapping; portable audio interface; rear view camera; front park distance control; 19-inch split-spoke wheels; rear air conditioning; illuminated front vanity mirrors; rear luggage net; interior mood lighting; electric seat driver's and passenger's adjustment; driver and passenger front armrests; and a leather gear knob.

As comprehensive as these spec' levels are, there's more in the Land Rover goody tin that hasn't been chosen for Australia, including tyre pressure monitoring - that's nuts, because tyre pressure monitoring is the first thing you need when going bush.

LIVING WITH THE DISCOVERY 4

Our test vehicles were SE models, with some options: electronically-lockable rear diff; metallic paint and an expensive navigation system (\$4430). The Discovery 3's original nav system was useless in the bush, but the hard drive upgrades have been significant and our Disco 3 system has been brought up to Disco 4 level, which is very good. Most bush tracks we've come across around Australia are shown, making the factory unit a useful option.

The lockable rear diff is a must-have for serious off-road work and we've found that the locked back end gives the traction control system a useful leg-up.

Metallic paint is an expensive choice, but there's no doubt about its quality. Our Disco 3 paint is still in good nick, despite years of bush work.

In stepping from the Disco 3 into the Discovery 4 we noticed firstly the switch from a proper ignition key to a stupid keyless start and stop system. We hate the thought of accidentally leaving home without the key fob, even though there's a key-proximity warning message inbuilt. Worse is the possibility that my beloved could take it shopping after being dropped off, leaving me in the Disco miles away, with the engine running.

In a changed control and dashboard layout graphics replace analogue coolant temperature and fuel gauges. The Terrain Response dial and Hill Descent Control button are easier to see and operate, and when selections are made they're repeated momentarily in graphic display on the dashboard screen.

Given the instrument panel LED graphics we expected a digital clock as well, but the Disco 4 has an 'old fashioned' analogue clock that you can actually read at a glance – much better than the illegible digital clock in the Disco 3.

Not so good is the loss of shelf space in front of the nav screen, where we're used to popping 'sunnies'. Also changed is the ash-tray design that used to be ideal for CB radio location, but the new one is too small. The Disco 4 Harman/Kardon sound system should be the same as the Disco 3's, but our optionally upgraded Disco 3 systems sounds much better than the current Disco 4 SE's nine-speaker standard kit. The better quality system is now an HSE exclusive. The Discovery 4 has iPod connectivity and charging, but the plug won't charge an iPhone.

The new manual-adjustment front seats look similar to the Disco 3 chairs, but they have more support. We swapped our seats for Recaros and, while we'd still move them into a Disco 4, there's no desperate need for improved seating. The power-adjustment seats in the HSE are even better.

The steering wheel switch shapes have been changed, to make them feel more recognisable by the fingertips and it's worked. Also, the rather confusing front and rear fog lamp switching in the Disco 3 – pull the headlight dial out one notch for front fogs and two notches for rears – has been swapped for more logical separate push buttons.

Our Disco 3 SE came with optional bi-xenon lights, but they're now standard with the three-litre engine and they incorporate cornering beams. The new beams are noticeably broader than the Disco 3's, even when driving straight ahead.

Auto-dimming interior and power-fold exterior mirrors are now standard. When you turn off the engine the mirrors tuck-in neatly and that's handy in tight car park spaces. The mirrors dip when reverse is selected in the HSE version.

The second and third-row seating is as before and is still far and away the best back-seat/cargo arrangement in the market. No other large wagon comes within cooee of the Land Rover design.

Engine noise is remarkably lower than in our 2.7-litre Discovery 3, which is already very quiet when compared with four-cylinder Japanese diesels. Twin turbos chop the intake noise pulses into little puffs and no-one picked the Disco 4 as a diesel, even at idle.

The six-speed auto's slick shifting feels the same, but the three-litre does everything using fewer engine revs – hence the economy improvement. The performance difference between our 2.7 and the new three-litre is shattering – to the point where I didn't dare to do a stopwatch comparison. The three-litre V6 Discovery 4 is almost a performance match for the Range Rover Sport V8 diesel and blows the LandCruiser 200's 4.5-litre V8 into the weeds.

Servicing intervals for the three-litre are flexible, with a guide being an annual oil drop or at 26,000km, but the engine management system measures engine load factors and will advise the driver of a hard-driven, heavily loaded or towing Disco 4 of the need for more frequent oil changes.

ON AND OFF ROAD

The Disco 3 was the best-handling large wagon in the market, but it's been supplanted by the Discovery 4, which is sharper and flatter and can be power-steered through the twisty bits. The considerable increase in grunt has been achieved with very little engine weight penalty, so the Disco 3's balance has been retained. 'Nough said.

Off road, the Discovery 4 retains the original's dynamics and the Terrain Response system has been enhanced somewhat. We noticed a difference in Hill Descent Control behaviour when in 'Rock Crawl' mode, because the new system pre-loads the wheel brakes. There was much less noise from the brakes during steep descents and less jerking than happens in our Disco 3.

The 'Sand' program has been altered to reduce initial wheelspin when lifting off in soft sand – important with the three-litre – but sand remains the nemesis of the Discovery, because it's a heavy mother and its low-profile rubber doesn't deform as readily at low pressures as tyres with taller sidewalls.

We checked out the new Gradient Release Control feature that temporarily holds brake pressure on steep slopes when descending a slippery waterfall.

GRC made manoeuvring the vehicle in this difficult situation relatively simple, because there was no roll-back or roll-forward during transition from brake to accelerator.

Sure, left-foot braking is always possible in these situations, but GRC makes that unnecessary.

With off-road height selected – a 55mm ground clearance increase - the air suspension system worked well in off-road situations and on two occasions we grounded the vehicle and had the automatic 'extended mode' suspension setting come into operation. This 35mm-higher suspension setting can't be driver selected, but it



boosts clearance when sensors detect that the vehicle is stuck. Once triggered, the extended height can be increased another 35mm by driver action if there's still not enough lift – making a total possible suspension lift of 125mm over road height.

BUSHABILITY

Our Disco 3 suffered from front end 'play' that was traced to prematurely worn ball joints and steering rack ends that were replaced under warranty with much more robust Discovery 4 front end bits. Ditto the front and rear anti-sway bar rubbers. The standard shock absorbers did more than 100,000 mainly bush kilometres before being replaced, so they're bush-tough.

The single most common problem with any 4x4 on long bush trips is...tyres. And what's the Discovery 4's greatest bushability weakness? Yep, its 19-inch tyres.

As at June 2011 there wasn't one 19-inch light truck (LT) tyre available for the Discovery 4. LT tyres typically have load ratings around 120, but the available 19-inchers are no tougher than around 112.

So, without a choice of bush rubber, would we replace our Discovery 3 with a Discovery 4? Yes, but we'd opt for the five-seat 2.7 model, with its smaller brake package and insist on the dealer fitting a set of Land Rover Disco 3 or after-market 17-inch wheels, for which there's a wide range of LT rubber available. We'd lose out on performance and braking power, but the 2.7 has proved to be a great kilometre-eater, even with our two-tonne boat and trailer behind.

We'd go for the lockable rear diff, nav system, rear view camera and bi-xenon lights, making it a 75-grand purchase. That's by far the best value for money large wagon in the marketplace.

PREVIOUS MODELS

The Disco 3 is great used buying, because most have never been off road.

BUSH MODIFICATIONS

Coil-sprung 'S' model Disco 3s benefit from taller coils and longer shock absorbers. All Discos need increased fuel capacity and a swing-away spare carrier makes fitting a second tank easy. Snorkels are available from Land Rover and the after-market. Most Disco 3 after-market bits will fit the Discovery 4, although rear chassis changes during the Discovery 3's development mean you need your VIN when ordering items such as LongRanger tanks and Kaymar swing-away spare wheel carriers.



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