

MOTOR

RoadTest

OVERFINCH 570S

Chevy muscle and British know-how combines to make 123 mph Range Rover.

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4WD SUPPLEMENT

*Drivers of the Overfinch 570S
They know that membership has its privileges
you can be seen in all the right places –
It's all down to Chevy muscle and British know-how*

Story: David Vivian



American



OVERFINCH 570S

*belong to an exclusive club.
and that, when your Range Rover does 123 mph,
like the overtaking lane of an autobahn.
and it costs £40,000. Don't wrap it up, I'll drive it home*

Photographs: Peter Burn

Intense body-building for Range Rovers has always seemed a slightly perverse business. I mean, if Solihull had intended their most prestigious and envied product to be fast and agile, they'd have made something about half the size and weight and called it an Audi Quattro.

It's not even as if the Range Rover is as ponderously slow and cumbersome as its estate car-on-steroids appearance would suggest: the aluminium-panelled leviathan will shake hands with 100 mph given only a tickle of wind on its barn-door rump and it's hard to think of another capable off-roader that feels so svelte and civilised with tarmac under its chunky tyres.

No, the Range Rover draws its strength from a delicately-mixed cocktail of virtues, the recipe for which no one else seems to have got quite right and the men who thought of it have no intention of changing. The emphasis is firmly on luxury and refinement and, as is usual in such cases, that means big and heavy. The attentions of Rover's enduringly superb Buick-derived all-alloy 3.5-litre V8 – better than ever with fuel injection – ensure that the RR's performance never feels limp-wristed; it develops too much torque for that.

I feel obliged to mention all this, by the way, out of respect for a vehicle which has seen off all competitors for 18 years in standard form. And, yes, there have been some pretty off-beat attempts to enliven its on-road progress. Turbocharging for instance. If there is a vehicle less suited to the dubious benefits of an exhaust-driven blower than the Range Rover, someone's keeping very quiet about it.

But there is one Range Rover conversion that works so well it knocks the "best left alone" argument into orbit. Back in 1982 it was called the Schuler 570T and gave at least one curly-haired and moustachioed Escort XR3i driver – clearly under the impression that he was Thomas Magnum PI on a case – the biggest fright of his life. Flat out on the straight and level he was overtaken, slowly but inexorably, by a big metal box with Tonka-toy tyres and what uncharitable observers have referred to as a Tonka-toy

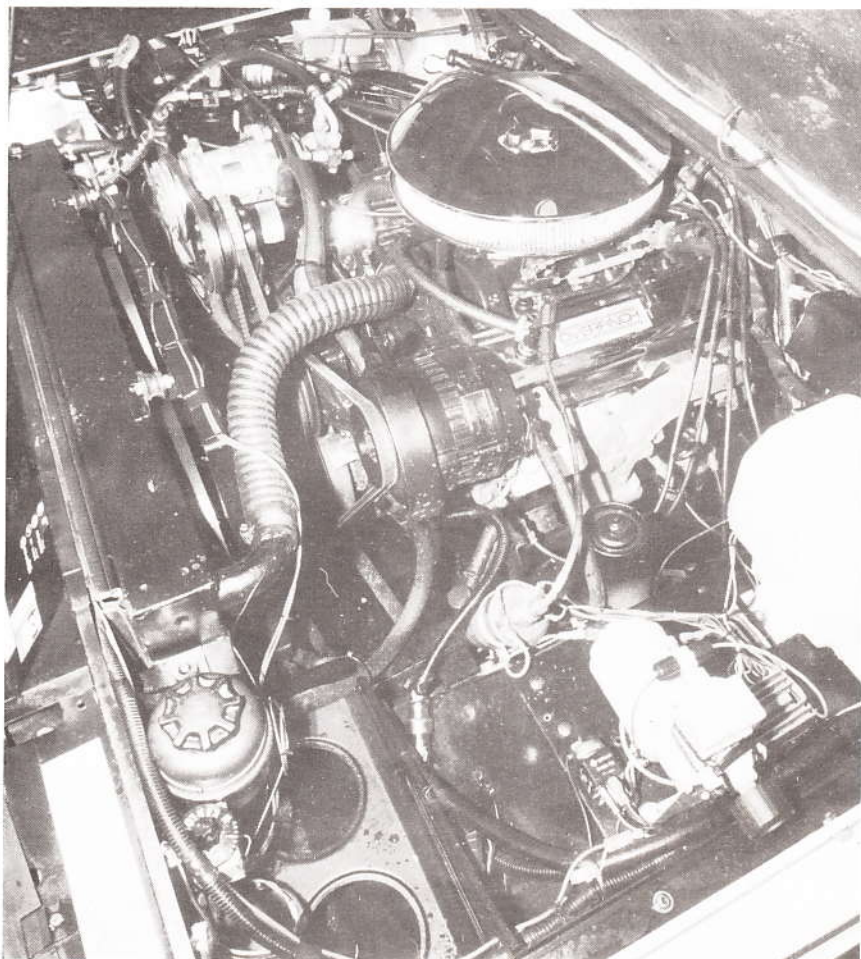
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driver at the wheel. I was too high up to see whether Magnum rubbed his eyes, but at least he thought better of shooting out the rear screen. Flat out in the 570T wasn't far short of 115 mph and, with a 0-60 mph time of 8.9 sec, the Schuler took no prisoners.

It's 1988 and the Schuler 570T has become the Overfinch 570T and, more importantly, has acquired a bigger brother which goes by the name of the 570 Sport and costs £40,000. The company name may have changed but the game is very much the same and is still masterminded by the father and son team of Arthur and Toby Silverton. If you thought the Schuler 570T was spectacular, the Overfinch 570S – benefactor of five years' development – is little short of miraculous. As before, the "570" refers to the engine that replaces the regular unit, a small-block 5.7-litre Chevy V8. Cracked out of the crate from the States it develops a useful 200 bhp – already 70 bhp up on the 3.5-litre Rover lump – but Overfinch pump this up to a vastly more entertaining 285 bhp by replacing the cast-iron heads with alloy items (smaller combustion chambers but bigger valves), raising the compression ratio to 9.5:1, fitting a higher lift camshaft and attending to the breathing. A thumping 350 lb ft of torque at 3000 rpm ensures that tree stumps are no safer with the Overfinch than with the British weather.

That sort of turning force puts unreasonable demands on a manual gearbox, but not on a beefy American auto. The one out of the Chevrolet Corvette and Camaro, the GM700, does just fine. But it's not the crude three-speeder you might imagine. As with the best European transmissions, it has four ratios with torque-converter lock-up on second, third and top. The only obvious omission is a "sport/economy" option, though seeking to extract anything that remotely resembled economy from a two-tonne, four-wheel drive bulk container powered by a 285 bhp 5.7-litre V8 is probably stretching a point; we managed 11.8 mpg.

Muscle building completed, Overfinch turn their attention to the Range Rover's chassis. First the brakes. The rear discs stay put but they're joined by enor-



It fits, but only just. Beneath the belts, tubes and cables is 5.7 litres of pure Chevy muscle delivering more than 300 lb ft of torque over virtually its entire rev range. Sounds good, too

Right: Italian leather steering wheel looks slightly out of place in the functional RR cabin but feels much better than original

OVERFINCH 570S



mous ventilated front discs one and a quarter inches thick and equipped with vents the size of small matchboxes. These are custom made for Overfinch by Automotive Products. The calipers' span is modified accordingly. Regular RR pads are retained, if for no other reason than that they don't need much warming up before they work efficiently. Next – and this is really the heart of the conversion – a viscous-coupling transfer box developed by FF Developments is fitted, distributing drive to the propshafts via a chain rather than the gears of the standard transmission.

The standard coil springs are chopped by 1.5 in to effect a similar lowering of ride height but, more interestingly, the job of damping and roll stiffness front and rear is given over to Monroe air struts. A compact compressor under the bonnet, activated by a switch under the fascia, provides air pressure for the struts, which resist body roll by the simple principle that there is nowhere for the air to go on the side taking the cornering forces. If you want to raise the ride height for off-road work you simply dial in more air pressure to the struts. Spring rates and anti-roll bar thickness can therefore remain standard, to the good of off-road articulation. Because of the enhanced on-road ability the modifications allow, the tyres have been compromised in that direction, too. They're massive 255/60 Avon Turbospeeds, a development of the tyres that make such a good fist of keeping the Bentley Mulanne Turbo in check, mounted on 16-in alloy rims standard to the Vogue. Fatter tyres, lower ride height: they're the only visual clues to the true nature of the Overfinch beast. Q-car disguises come no more potent than this.

I have a confession to make. I undertook some of the most seriously rapid B-road driving of my life in this car. When I say "serious" I don't mean getting from A to B faster than ever before in a Range Rover-class car – though that was certainly a consequence. What I mean is that a Honda Accord 2.0i-16 driver didn't understand being overtaken by the Overfinch at all well. It was virtually a re-run of Magnum and the XR3i, except that this chap refused to



Left: After-market cruise control wasn't connected



Overfinch takes the rough with the smooth





accept defeat gracefully. I suppose when you know your car is good for 120 mph plus and you watch the door handle of what appears to be a standard farmer's runabout slip serenely by, something snaps. In the case of the Honda driver, it was clearly akin to belittling his manhood. With nothing further from my mind I eased the pace. I now know this was a mistake, for it allowed the Accord's desperate driver to execute one of the most daring overtaking manoeuvres I've ever witnessed. I had to hit the brakes to avoid what would have been an interesting modification to the Range Rover's nose and a radical rearrangement of the Honda's nether regions. From that moment "a matter of honour" took on an intensity of meaning Jeffrey Archer wouldn't have believed possible.

The Honda was a formidable adversary, driven by a man not only possessed but in possession of a knowledge far in advance of mine of the road along which we were travelling under the cover of night. My advantage rested purely with the machine I was driving which, I can now reveal, had earlier that day lapped Millbrook's high-speed bowl at an astonishing 123 mph and accelerated from rest to 60 mph in a barely credible 7.7 sec. I knew this but he didn't and the difference was

crucial. Transformed as the Range Rover's handling is by its 37/63 per cent viscous-coupled torque split, no-roll air struts and Mulsanne Turbo tyres — all of which conspire to provide a level of grip an Accord couldn't even look at — it can't match the agility and speed of helm response displayed by a good sporting front-drive saloon, which the Honda is. The Accord flicked through esses that I was forced to straighten to a degree that would have been ill-advised without the fine visibility afforded by a Range Rover's towering driving position and the Honda as a marker. Yet, despite the 570's considerable width, I was still using less road on faster bends that relied more on pure grip: I could actually see the Accord scrabbling for adhesion as it understeered away from apex after apex. The Overfinch felt composed and immensely secure. What with that and the 570's accelerative edge, there was simply no way that the Honda in a hurry could get away.

After its driver turned off — and I continued on my way at a greatly reduced pace — it occurred to me that my pursuit might have been misconstrued as an attempt to capture and inflict a measure of pain on the last of the late overtakers. Poor man. However, I didn't regret the exercise. In the space of 10

miles I'd learnt as much about the 570's dynamic qualities as I wanted to. It was an awesome demonstration.

The Chevy V8 really is a charismatic performer — not quite as smooth as the 3.5-litre Rover at high revs, but stunningly flexible. From a standstill, the torque simply catapults the 570 into motion, as the 0-30 mph time of 2.4 sec testifies. The engine note is slightly tappety but bellows deeply under full throttle; there's an entire American car chase soundtrack under the bonnet. It all gets a bit breathless beyond 5000 revs, but by that time the scenery has acquired speed lines and, in any case, the auto never lets the engine labour in unproductive territory. Silken smoothness is another of the GM700's attributes: it doesn't know the meaning of a jerky shift either up or down the ratios. These are uncompromisingly long-legged and, in top, 30 mph corresponds with 1000 revs. So the 570 can be as lazy as you like, burbling through town on a whisper of throttle. Prod the accelerator, though, and kickdown is instant.

To complement its remarkable handling, the Overfinch boasts a ride of rare quality — every bit as supple as the standard car over pock-marked surfaces but largely free from the

lurch and float that can wrong-foot Range Rovers at speed. The brakes aren't quite as reassuring, spoiling the impression created by a firm pedal and powerful initial retardation with a propensity to lock-up prematurely. The anti-lock braking offered as an option should be standard.

After all, this is no ordinary car. It's several cars rolled into one: a Range Rover with the sonic charisma of an American musclecar, the performance of a VW Golf GTI 16V, and the cornering ability of an Audi Quattro. Now tell me £40,000 is expensive. **M**

PERFORMANCE

	Overfinch 570S mph	Vogue mph
MAXIMUM SPEEDS		
Banked circuit	122.6	102.5
ACCELERATION FROM REST		
mph	sec	sec
0-30	2.4	4.1
0-40	4.0	6.2
0-50	5.6	9.1
0-60	7.7	12.3
0-70	10.6	17.2
0-80	13.8	24.0
0-90	18.4	34.4
0-100	24.5	—
ACCELERATION IN KICKDOWN		
mph	sec	sec
20-40	2.5	3.7
30-50	3.2	5.0
40-60	3.7	6.2
50-70	4.0	8.1
60-80	6.1	11.7
70-90	7.8	17.2
80-100	10.7	—
FUEL CONSUMPTION		
Overall mpg	11.8	16.4